

Mission Valley Aquatics

Feasibility Study

November, 2004

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Executive Summary

Efforts to build a public aquatic center in the Mission Valley have been made for a number of years without success. Mission Valley Aquatics, a not-for-profit organization made up of individuals from the Polson, Montana area, have rekindled the effort and re-established a number of partnerships. This feasibility study, written on behalf of Mission Valley Aquatics, examines the local swimming related conditions, demographic data, national and statewide recreational trends, expressed community support, potential facility types and locations, construction costs, long-term financing and organizational sustainability options.

Research conducted for this study indicates local residents can support an aquatic facility. If a number of factors are adequately accounted for, up to 44,000 annual visitors and annual revenues of \$125,000 or more could be generated after a few years of operation.

Due to a number of factors it appears Polson is the Mission Valley community that could best support an aquatic facility, although Pablo also provides a promising opportunity.

For a local aquatic facility to be constructed the community would have to get behind the project by donating cash, services and materials. A funding package that includes a recreational bond also appears to be necessary due to the limited size of the local market. Such bonds are difficult to pass, but if the costs were reasonable and the public was convinced of the value of the project, recent history indicates bond passage is possible.

For a Mission Valley aquatic facility to be sustainable it must provide features and programs not available elsewhere. These include a warm water pool, children's play features, a clean, safe, attractive environment and activities such as aqua aerobics,

swimming lessons and programs targeted toward senior citizens. Features such as exercise equipment, a day care and an on-site physical therapy office would also increase the number of visitors. Because such recreational facilities typically are not self-supporting in smaller markets, on-going taxpayer operational funding would be necessary.

The likelihood of success will depend on the amount of time, effort and public support Mission Valley Aquatics can generate. Examples of recent similar, successful projects throughout western Montana are highlighted in this study and Mission Valley Aquatics is encouraged to learn from their efforts.

Chapter I

Existing Conditions

In order to determine the feasibility of developing an aquatic facility in the Mission Valley it is necessary to examine the existing demographic and swimming-related conditions. This evaluation will help to determine the levels of need and competition for an aquatic facility. The core market for such a facility is typically made up of local users, as opposed to visitors from outside of the area. Visitors can add to the revenue stream, but the facility should strive to serve the local market first.

Primary Service Areas

An area with a 15-mile radius is commonly used to assess the recreational needs and number of potential users within a population. This area is called the primary service area and refers to the distance people will travel on a regular basis (once per week) to utilize an aquatic facility or its programs. The boundaries of the primary service area support a driving distance (15 to 20 minutes) that people will regularly travel. Within that distance, of course, are people who would also regularly walk or bicycle to a facility. It is important to note that due to the somewhat rural nature of the Mission Valley and the specialized nature of an aquatic facility, residents from outside of the primary service area can be expected to travel to the facility with some regularity. Therefore, a 15-mile primary service area is a conservative baseline from which to project user figures.

This chapter evaluates three primary service areas, as shown on Figure 1. Each of the primary service areas has a 15-mile radius that is centered on the communities of Polson, Pablo and Ronan. Due to the close proximity of the communities to each other, there is a great deal of overlap in the primary service areas. However, the three communities each have their own distinct characteristics.

The incorporated City of Polson is the seat of Lake County government and had a permanent year round population of 4,041 persons during 2000, making it the largest community in the Mission Valley. The Polson primary service area population during 2000 was 16,757 full time residents. Polson is located on the southern shore of Flathead Lake and provides a relatively wide variety of shopping opportunities to a steadily growing number of residents and visitors. Polson has the highest taxable value and more assets under bank management than any other community in the Mission Valley. The Polson area is also a summer destination and the local population swells by three or four times on some weekends as visitors from all over the state and country enjoy Flathead Lake and the surrounding region.

Located approximately six miles to the south of Polson is the unincorporated town of Pablo. Pablo had a 2000 population of 1,814 persons and a primary service area population of 17,452 persons. The Pablo area grew by almost 40 percent from 1990 to 2000, which was easily the fastest rate of growth of any community in the Mission Valley

during that period. Pablo is the headquarters of the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes as well as a number of Tribal enterprises, educational facilities and programs. The town is located along U.S. Highway 93 and has government and educational facilities, residential areas and businesses along the east and west sides of the highway.

Also located along U.S. Highway 93 approximately five miles south of Pablo is the incorporated City of Ronan. Ronan had a year 2000 population of 1,812 persons within the city limits and had a primary service area population of 17,906 persons, which is the largest of the three. Ronan is arguably the agricultural center of the Mission Valley and provides services to residents throughout the area.

In evaluating the potential of these areas to provide the best location for serving the aquatics needs of the local public, a number of national and statewide trends are important to consider. These trends can be roughly divided under the headings of general swimming data, age distribution, educational attainment and annual household income. The final section of this chapter provides potential user numbers that can be used to generate revenue projections.

General Swimming Data

In national, statewide and local assessments, swimming has been found to be one of the most popular recreational activities and the need for swimming facilities has been reported to be very high. On the national level, the USDA Forest Service and the University of Tennessee's *1999-2000 National Survey on Recreation and the Environment* reported that 60 percent of non-institutionalized, civilian Americans swam at least once during the year-long survey period. A 2003 report by the National Sporting Goods Association reported that approximately 22 percent of Americans over seven years of age swam more than once during the previous year. The variation in swimming participation percentages between the two studies can be attributed to the methodologies employed and other factors. Based on these and other national studies, it is estimated that up to 20 percent of the American population participates in swimming on a fairly regular basis.

The National Sporting Goods Association has reported that swimming participation, although it is quite high compared to other activities, declined by about 17 percent from 1991-2001. However, the study noted an overall drop in physical recreational activities in the American public as a whole.

The American Recreation Coalition's study titled *Outdoor Recreation in America, 2003: Recreation's Benefits to Society Challenged by Trends* reported that swimming was one of the top three recreational choices for the public (walking/running and driving for pleasure were the other two), although swimming lags behind the national participation rate in the western United States. The lower participation rate in the west could be due in part to the rural nature of most of the west, the lack of developed swimming facilities and the general abundance of outdoor recreational opportunities throughout the region.

In Montana, the Department of Commerce's 1999 study titled *Recreation Participation Patterns by Montana Residents* reported that 32 percent of respondents stated that at least one member of their household swam during the year-long survey period. The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks' *Montana 2003-2007 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan* reports that Montana residents stated the recreation facilities in highest demand are swimming pools. At the local level, this plan reports the facility needs mentioned most frequently by land and recreation managers were swimming pools. The 2002 *Community Needs and Attitude Assessment* by the Lower Flathead Valley Community Foundation also reported that swimming pools were one of the most desired recreational facilities throughout the Mission and Jocko Valleys. Survey data collected for this feasibility study by Mission Valley Aquatics is presented in Chapter II.

Age Distribution

The age and family status of swimmers is an important factor in determining the number of visitors that can be expected to use an aquatic facility. The 1999 Montana Department of Commerce's study titled *Recreation Participation Patterns by Montana Residents* reported that households with children were far more likely to engage in recreational activities than those without children. A 2001 study by the American Recreation Coalition reported that 51 percent of adults with children at home participate in swimming. This study noted that recreation participation by families with children has been shown to be generally above the national average and families with one or more children under the age of seven are the most active. The study states that family members participate in a mean number of 5.4 recreational activities annually versus 4.7 for the average adult. This study also indicates that families participate above the national average in most activities and especially in swimming (14 points above average).

According to data published by the National Sporting Goods Association and other sources, 7 through 11 year olds have the highest percentage of swimming participation, and the target market for an aquatic recreation facility is typically 5 to 17 year olds. Also, due to the size of their population and because they tend to have children who swim, 35 to 44 year olds participate in swimming in the greatest overall numbers.

As the population ages, there appears to be less demand for strenuous recreational activities, although the health and fitness benefits are arguably as great with older segments of the population as with younger ones. A number of surveys point toward greater demand for activities like walking, golf, fishing and motorized recreation in older segments of the population. The 2000 *Montana Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System* report noted that adults aged 65 and older were most likely to be inactive, significantly more so than younger adults. The report also states that 18-29 year old adults were far more likely to report engaging in physical activity than those aged 65 or older and that physical inactivity increases with age. However, if an aquatic facility is built in the Mission Valley, the older segment of the population should be targeted with age-appropriate programming (water aerobics in a warm water environment, walking paths leading to and within the facility, etc.) due to the free time many older residents enjoy as well as the health benefits of low impact exercise.

The table below provides a percentage breakdown of age groups within the three different primary service areas. Figures for the United States as a whole are also included for comparison and are based on 2000 U.S. Census Bureau data. The table shows strong similarities in population percentages across age groups due in large part to the close proximity and overlap of the primary service areas. The target age group for aquatic facilities is typically 5-17 year olds as well as their parents. All three areas exceed the national average for this younger age group.

Table I-1

Primary Service Area Population Ages Percentages

Primary Service Area	Less than 5	5-19	Ages 20-44	45 Years and Older
Polson	5.9%	23.9%	27.7%	42.5%
Pablo	6.1%	25.2%	28.6%	40.2%
Ronan	7%	26%	30.3%	36.7%
United States	6.8%	21.8%	36.9%	34.4%

As stated previously in this chapter, the total population of the Polson primary service area was 16,757 in 2000, while Pablo had 17,452 residents and Ronan had 17,906 residents. The U.S. Census Bureau does not publish future population projection figures on the city or town level, but does so at the county level. According to the Census Bureau, Lake County is predicted to grow by 18 percent from 2000 to 2010. Based on the Census Bureau's 2000 population and future growth projection figures, the Polson primary service area has a 2004 population of 17,963 residents, while the Pablo and Ronan primary service areas have 2004 populations of 18,708 and 19,195 residents. The future population growth of Lake County is also predicted to remain strong across all age groups. The Census Bureau projects Lake County will grow from 2000 figures by 28 percent to 2015 and by 47 percent to 2025.

The following table provides a breakdown of households within the three different primary service areas and the United States as a whole. The figures presented below are based on 2000 U.S. Census Bureau data.

Table I-2

Primary Service Area Households

Primary Service Area	Number of Households	Households with Children	Percentage of Households with Children
Polson	6,584	2,483	38%
Pablo	6,460	2,354	36%
Ronan	6,651	2,654	39%

United States	105,653,773	38,022,115	36%
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As the above table illustrates, all three primary service areas have a percentage of households with children equal to or greater than the national average. The Ronan primary service area may have a slight edge in terms of the total number of households, households with children and the percentage of households with children. However, when accounting for statistical variation and margin of error, the numbers and percentages are roughly equal. It must be noted that the similarities in data across the primary service areas are largely due to the overlapping populations within those areas.

Educational Attainment

In much of the published recreation related research there appears to be a correlation between educational attainment levels and participation in recreational activities. In the study titled *Recreation Participation Patterns by Montana Residents*, the Montana Department of Commerce stated that persons with a college degree or greater reported significantly higher participation rates than those with a high school diploma or less. *The Montana Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System* reported that 44 percent of adults with less than a high school education were inactive while only 15 percent of college graduates were inactive. This report also noted that the percentage of physically inactive adults decreased correspondingly with increasing educational attainment levels.

As the following table shows, 2000 U.S. Census Bureau data indicate in all three of the primary service areas the national average for attaining less than a high school diploma is greater than in the local areas. Also, a higher percentage of local residents has a high school diploma than the national average. U.S. Census Bureau data indicate the local population has some advanced training and bachelor’s degree levels roughly equal to or exceeding the national average. However, the local population is lower than the national average in terms of attaining advanced degrees.

Table I-3

Educational Attainment Level in the Primary Service Areas

Primary Service Area	Less than HS Diploma	HS Diploma Only	Advanced Training, Less than Bach. Degree	Bachelor’s Degree	Advanced Degree
Polson	15%	33%	28%	17%	7%
Pablo	15%	32%	28%	17%	7%
Ronan	14%	35%	27%	15%	6%
U.S.	19.6%	28.6%	27.3%	15.5%	8.9%

Because a predictor of potential user numbers appears to be educational attainment level, the Polson and Pablo primary service areas have a slight advantage over the Ronan area in this category in that 52 percent of the population has at least some advanced training past high school. This is roughly equal to the national average of 51.7 percent, while in the Ronan primary service area, roughly 48 percent of the population has at least some advanced training.

Annual Household Income

In *Recreation Participation Patterns by Montana Residents*, the Montana Department of Commerce notes that households with more than \$50,000 in annual income were far more likely to participate in recreational activities than households with incomes ranging between \$20,000 and \$50,000. Similarly, those households with less than \$20,000 in annual income were less likely to participate in recreational activities than households with annual incomes ranging between \$20,000 and \$50,000. This segment of the study concluded that households with children and households with incomes greater than \$50,000 were the most likely to participate in recreational activities. This study reported a clear correlation between income, education and higher participation in outdoor recreation. The above-cited Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services’ April 2000 study also found that adults with annual household income levels of \$35,000 or more were more likely to be active than adults with less than \$35,000 in household income. These and other studies point to the conclusion that affordability of any recreational activity is a key issue.

Table I-4

Annual Household Income

Primary Service Area	Less than \$20,000	\$20,000 - \$35,000	\$35,000 - \$50,000	Greater than \$50,000
Polson	30%	24%	17%	29%
Pablo	29%	26%	16%	29%
Ronan	31%	25%	17%	26%
United States	22%	19%	17%	42%

As the above table indicates, all three of the primary service areas have a significantly larger percentage of households earning less than \$35,000 annually than the United States as a whole. The data also show the three primary service areas as having a roughly equal percentage of households earning between \$35,000 and \$50,000 as the United States, but far fewer earning more than \$50,000 per year. Using annual household income as a measure, the Polson and Pablo primary service areas have a slightly larger percentage of households earning \$35,000 or greater than the Ronan area. It must also be noted that the cost of living in all of these areas appears to be less than the national average while the annual household income is significantly less. Therefore, the amount of discretionary income available to local residents is limited.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 1999 across the United States, 13.6 percent of families with children under the age of 18 lived in poverty. During that year the Montana poverty rate for families with children was 16.4 percent, the Lake County rate was 23.1 percent and the Flathead Indian Reservation rate was 24.9 percent.

Current Aquatic Recreational Facilities

The Mission Valley contains a number of places for summertime swimming and aquatic recreation used by residents and visitors. These places can be considered competition for a future aquatic facility in the Mission Valley during the summer. The major water bodies are Flathead Lake, McDonald Lake, Mission Reservoir, St. Mary's Lake, Lake Mary Ronan, the Flathead River and the swimming pools at the Boys and Girls Club of the Flathead Indian Reservation. According to Tribal Wildland Recreation Department, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks and Polson City staff, limited data are available on the actual number of annual swimmer days. However, based on personal observation and visitation data from the Montana state park system, these natural resources support hundreds of thousands of swimmer days for locals and visitors during the summer period. In addition to these water bodies, there are also a number of other local reservoirs, creeks and even irrigation canals that allow local bathers to cool off on hot summer days.

All of the above-named water bodies have developed facilities for water users. On Flathead Lake, the City of Polson manages Riverside Park, Sacajawea Park and Boettecher Park for swimmers. During past years lifeguards were on duty during summer days at Riverside and Boettecher Parks but they were not present during the summer of 2004 due to budgetary limitations. Swimming lessons are periodically provided at Boettecher Park and all of the City waterfront parks also have sanitary, picnic and playground facilities. Salish Point, which falls under the cooperative jurisdiction of the City of Polson and the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes and is adjacent to Sacajawea Park, is also heavily used by swimmers during the summer months. Water temperatures in Flathead Lake range up to about 77 degrees Fahrenheit, although the swimming season only typically lasts for three months from around mid June to mid September.

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks manages a number of state parks on Flathead Lake that are used by area swimmers. These parks include the Big Arm, West Shore, Wildhorse Island, Wayfarers, Yellow Bay and Finley Point Units of the Flathead Lake State Park system, in addition to four fishing access sites at various locations. Visitation data provided by Fish Wildlife and Parks indicate that the above parks and fishing access sites saw over 230,000 visitors in 2003. Of these, Fish, Wildlife and Parks estimates 25 percent are swimmers, resulting in over 57,500 swimmer days in the Flathead Lake State Park system during 2003.

The Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes provide access at Elmo and maintain a developed facility at Blue Bay. A number of other small public access points also exist along the lakeshore. Due to its scenic beauty, centrally located and multiple free access

points in Polson as well as all of the other amenities it provides, Flathead Lake must be considered the greatest competition for a new aquatic facility in the Mission Valley during the summer months.

However, while Flathead Lake is both enjoyable and popular, it does have some limitations. At Riverside and Boettecher Parks and at Salish Point, swimmers recreate alongside boaters, which presents safety and liability concerns. There are no truly organized or comprehensive swimming lesson programs so many residents do not learn to swim proficiently. Also, the water temperature is sufficient to swim for a relatively short period each year and when the water is warmest, swimmer's itch, an irritating skin condition resulting from bacteria associated with waterfowl feces, is present in the shallowest bays.

The Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes provide developed facilities at McDonald Lake, Mission Reservoir and St. Mary's Lake that are used by the Tribal and non-tribal public. These water bodies are located in scenic mountain basins and are fed by snow melt so the water temperatures are typically colder than in Flathead Lake. No user rates are available for these water bodies.

The most heavily used and only quasi-public swimming pools in the Mission Valley are located at the Boys and Girls Club of the Flathead Reservation along U.S. Highway 93 in Ronan. The Boys and Girls Club has two above-ground swimming pools that measure approximately 20 feet long by 14 feet wide and are four feet in depth. Boys and Girls Club members, ages five to 18, use the pools from June through August during week days. The pools have vinyl, tent-like covers that, according to the facility manager, are difficult to keep in good repair. The club offers swimming lessons and serves up to 110 children per day during the hottest periods of the year, most of whom are from the Ronan area. The facility provides between 3,000 and 5,000 swimmer days during the summer, depending largely on the weather. The pools are also used for water aerobics by a local group that donates the proceeds to the Boys and Girls Club.

Compared with the other programs the Boys and Girls Club offers, the swimming pools take a great deal of resources to keep up. Costs include propane for warming the water (the pools are heated to 86 degrees Fahrenheit), swimming lessons and lifeguard staff, and operation and maintenance. The Boys and Girls Club is located on Tribally-owned property and the facility will have to be moved in approximately 2009 for reconstruction of U.S. Highway 93 through Ronan. The Boys and Girls Club received both the pools and the operation and maintenance funding for the pools in a grant from the Lower Flathead Valley Community Foundation. Other assistance comes from federal grants and a small portion comes from fundraisers and user fees.

In 2003 the Boys and Girls Club charged \$30 per two week period to local youths to use the pools. This charge reportedly proved to be a barrier to many local youths families and swimmer participation dropped off. In 2004 the fee was \$5 for a club membership with unlimited use of the swimming pools. According to the manager of the Boys and Girls Club, most of the children walk, ride their bicycles or are dropped off by their

parents at the facility. Barriers to increased use include the capacity of the pools (about 20 kids at a time), parents concerned about inadequate supervision and the image of the facility for some teenagers who think the pools are not cool. Financing is also reportedly a problem, with many youth recreation grants being targeted toward after school programs instead of summer programs. Based on conversations with the facility manager, it seems likely the Boys and Girls Club would be interested in partnering with Mission Valley Aquatics to provide for some of the recreational needs of area youth, particularly when the club is forced to move later this decade.

In addition to the Boys and Girls Club pools, there are a number of private pools in the Mission Valley. The Best Western KwaTaqNuk resort on Flathead Lake in Polson has an indoor pool where guests recreate and swimming lessons are occasionally offered. Local orthopedic doctors and physical therapists operate a small therapeutic pool to treat their patients in the Polson area. Also, in a locally funded effort, the people of Charlo constructed an outdoor swimming pool but the project has not been completed due to the costs associated with operating the facility. Other pools exist in the area, but provide for the aquatic needs of relatively few area residents.

User Projections

Projecting the likely number of users of an aquatic facility in the Mission Valley at this early stage is a difficult task because there are so many variables to consider. These variables include user cost, facility features, seasonal versus year-round operation, distance from Flathead Lake and programming options. However, demographic data, an evaluation of local recreational opportunities and national aquatics participation trends provide some important factors to consider. These include:

1. In all of the primary service areas the percentage of 5-19 year olds exceeds the national average.
2. In all of the primary service areas the percentage 45+ year olds also exceeds the national average.
3. In the Polson and Ronan primary service areas, the percentage of households with children exceeds national averages while in the Pablo primary service area, the percentage of households with children equals the national average.
4. In all of the primary service areas the educational attainment level exceeds the national average with the exception of the percentage of the local population with advanced degrees, which is below the national average.
5. In all of the primary service areas, household income in the \$50,000+ per year range is well below the national average, although the local cost of living appears to be below the national average.

6. All segments of the local population are expected to continue to grow at a steady rate.
7. The facility must be easily accessible, affordable, clean, safe and provide recreational opportunities not available elsewhere.
8. The presence of convenient and affordable access to Flathead Lake and other water bodies makes for stiff competition during the summer months.
9. Because the Mission Valley is fairly rural and sees a substantial number of visitors during the summer months, the out-of-town users of an aquatic facility can be expected to increase baseline local user figures.
10. Research provided in other studies shows that at community recreation centers across the United States, roughly 15 to 20 percent of the population participates in active recreational activities.
11. Other sources indicate that roughly 20 percent of the population participates in swimming on a fairly regular basis.

Based on the demographic data within the three primary service areas, national and statewide aquatic and recreational participation trends and comparisons with aquatic facility user rates in other markets, it can be estimated that an average of five percent of local population from a primary service area is likely to use an indoor aquatic facility on a weekly basis if the factors detailed below are addressed. Using 2004 population estimates, this translates into an average of 898 weekly users in the Polson primary service area, 935 weekly users in the Pablo primary service area and 959 weekly users in the Ronan primary service area. To be conservative, one should subtract the weeks surrounding the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays and four weeks during the summer when the lake is irresistible. These figures result in up to 41,308 annual visitors to a facility in Polson, 43,010 annual visitors to a facility in Pablo and 44,114 annual visitors to a facility in Ronan. These figures are estimates and do not guarantee a certain level of visitation, but can be used for planning purposes if the following factors are adequately addressed.

The facility must be easily accessible, affordable, clean, safe and provide recreational opportunities not available elsewhere. The entry fee for a facility would also have an impact on user rates, as would hours of operation and programming options. A major determinate in user rates will also be seasonality, where local school districts and swim teams could add to user figures and revenue if an indoor facility were built, although the costs of construction, operation and maintenance would also increase substantially. Also, the presence of complimentary features and services such as a day care, indoor or outdoor walking paths, cardiovascular and weight training equipment and others could add a substantial boost to user rates. Additionally, the weekly local user rate for a facility in Polson may be less than shown above during the summer months due to affordable and

high quality access to Flathead Lake. However, the out-of-town visitor rate seems most promising in Polson due to its status as a recreational destination.

When examining only demographic data, all of the primary service areas appear to be roughly equal in terms of their ability to support an aquatic facility. The Ronan primary service area has a slight advantage in terms of age distribution, total population and households with children. The Polson and Pablo primary service areas have a slight advantage over Ronan in terms of educational attainment levels and annual household income. However, given statistical variations and margins of error, these differences are not sufficient to differentiate one primary service area from another.

According to a number of aquatic recreation professionals, a primary service area of 15,000 residents is necessary to support an outdoor aquatic facility, with significantly more residents needed to support an indoor one. All of the primary service areas have more than 15,000 residents but less than 20,000. As stated above, there are a number of high quality and heavily used aquatic recreation sites in the Mission Valley, although almost all of them are outdoors. Because competing with Flathead Lake and the other natural water bodies will be a challenge during the summer months, some of the features and programs that could be incorporated into an aquatic facility are water park type facilities, organized swimming lessons, competitive programs, aqua aerobics, aqua therapy, etc. These programs would serve both local residents and attract visitors from outside of the area. Perhaps most importantly, an aquatic facility would also have to be cost effective for area families due to their limited discretionary spending capacity.

Chapter II

Community Involvement

Since the inception of Mission Valley Aquatics in 2002, volunteers associated with the group have been holding regular fund raising events and establishing momentum to build an aquatic facility. Mission Valley Aquatics members have given presentations to city council members, county commissioners, tribal council members, school district boards, hospital personnel, the Polson Chamber of Commerce and numerous service groups. Their efforts have resulted in widespread support for the project, although it is reportedly tinged with a degree of skepticism. The skepticism stems from the fact that community members and groups have been discussing building an aquatic facility for a number of years with no success to date.

For this feasibility study, local outreach efforts included meeting with the superintendents of the Polson and Ronan/Pablo public school districts, representatives of Salish Kootenai College, the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes, the Salish Kootenai Housing Authority, the Lower Flathead Community Foundation, the Boys and Girls Club of the Flathead Reservation, local health care providers, law enforcement personnel, community development professionals, city council members, county commissioners, city and county public works staff and senior citizens. The purposes of the outreach effort were to inform interested parties of Mission Valley Aquatics' efforts to build an aquatic facility, to solicit ideas for making this idea a reality and to build partnerships. The comments and ideas of the various parties are included throughout this document. All of the persons contacted expressed significant interest in the project and many expressed a willingness to support the construction and ongoing operation of an aquatic facility. However, up to this point, no concentrated effort had been made to evaluate the overall level of public support.

To better gauge the level of public support, Mission Valley Aquatics developed a questionnaire that was distributed to 12,500 homes and businesses on the Flathead Indian Reservation through monthly Mission Valley Power bills. It must be noted that not all of Mission Valley Power's account holders received a copy of the questionnaire. Mission Valley Power serves 16,000 homes and businesses on and off the Flathead Indian Reservation and only 12,500 surveys were included in the mailings. According to a Mission Valley Power representative, the areas that surveys were not mailed to include the area from south of Polson to north of Pablo and the Elmo, Big Arm, Dayton, Charlo and Arlee areas. Because of the lack of comprehensive questionnaire distribution, there are limitations with the results of this questionnaire.

The questionnaire was designed to solicit information from heads of households regarding demographic characteristics, aquatic participation rates, desired facility features and facility financing. The outreach effort was publicized by local radio stations and newspaper articles. Of the 12,500 distributed questionnaires, 519 were returned by mail for a response rate of just over four percent. This response rate is not generally considered statistically significant, but is not considered a poor rate of response for a mail-in survey. Although the respondents mailed in 519 questionnaires, not all of the respondents answered every question. The results of the survey are presented in the

following paragraphs and a summary is presented at the end of this chapter. A copy of the questionnaire is presented in Appendix A of this document.

Demographic Characteristics

The first question asked respondents what town they lived in. Of the 517 responses to this question, almost 70 percent of the respondents indicated they lived in Polson, 14 percent indicated they lived in Ronan, eight percent indicated they lived in St. Ignatius and the remaining eight percent stated they lived in other local communities. Based on the above answers and the geographic areas the survey was circulated to, the results of the survey are heavily weighted in favor of Polson area respondents. Because the survey did not ask whether respondents lived within the municipal boundaries of Polson, Ronan or St. Ignatius, which are the only three incorporated areas of the Mission Valley, it can be assumed the respondents live within or within close proximity to those municipalities.

The second question asked the respondents to include the number of persons within their households and to list the ages of all of those persons. Of the 512 responses to this question, approximately 15 percent indicated they lived in one-person households, 45 percent indicated they lived in two-person households and approximately 40 percent indicated they lived in households with three to 10 persons.

The respondents to this question identified a total of 1,329 people in their households. An age breakdown is presented in the following table.

Table II-1

Age Breakdown

Age	0-5	6-12	13-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-67	70+
Number	95	150	160	65	142	185	198	186	148
Percentage	7%	11%	12%	5%	11%	14%	15%	14%	11%

The age breakdown shows 405 children ranging 0 to 19 years of age and 392 persons ranging from 20 to 49 years of age. These numbers represent the families with children who are typically the most likely to participate in recreational activities. Children make up 30 percent of the total while persons who are within the usual parenting range make up 30 percent of the total. Those persons age 50 and over, who typically do not have children at home, make up 40 percent of those accounted for in the survey question. The above percentages are roughly equal to the age breakdowns in the three primary service areas of Polson, Pablo and Ronan.

The third question asked respondents to indicate the highest level of education attained by members of their household. Because respondents could indicate more than one choice, a total of 724 responses were received to this question on the 519 survey forms mailed in. Out of 724 responses, 28 percent of the respondents indicated the highest educational attainment level was a high school or general equivalency diploma, 15

percent cited vocational training and 12 percent indicated someone in their household has obtained an associates degree. These educational attainment rates are somewhat consistent with the educational attainment rates shown in Chapter I.

However, 28 percent of the respondents to this question indicated someone in their household had obtained a bachelor’s degree and 18 percent indicated someone in their household had obtained a graduate degree, for a total of 46 percent. When compared with the educational attainment levels presented in Chapter I, where no more than 24 percent of the population in any of the three primary services areas obtained a bachelor’s and/or advanced degree, these results indicate a high percentage of the most educated segment of the population responded to this survey.

The results of this question in particular are heavily weighted in favor of Polson area respondents, where 48 percent of the respondents indicated the highest level of educational attainment in their household is either a bachelor’s or advanced degree. By contrast, 36 percent of Ronan area respondents indicated the highest level of educational attainment in their household is either a bachelor’s degree or an advanced degree.

Question number four asked respondents to indicate their approximate annual household income. The following table shows a breakdown of the 470 responses to question number four.

Table II-2

Responses to Annual Household Income Survey Question

Overall household Income	Number of responses	Percentage
\$0 - \$10,000	28	6%
\$10,001 - \$20,000	59	13%
\$20,001 - \$30,000	71	15%
\$30,001 - \$40,000	85	18%
\$40,001 - \$50,000	63	13%
\$50,001 - \$60,000	63	13%
\$60,000 plus	101	22%

As stated in Chapter I, households with annual incomes greater than \$50,000 are the most likely to participate in recreational activities and those households earning between \$35,000 and \$50,000 are more likely to participate in recreational activities than those earning less. In the case of this survey, 35 percent of the respondents indicated their household income is greater than \$50,000 compared with no more than 29 percent of the

households in any of the primary service areas evaluated in this study. The higher local rate of high-income households participating in this survey is still less than the national average of 42 percent (in year 2000 figures). However, this high rate of participation, coupled with the fact that only 18 percent of the respondents indicated their households earns less than \$20,000 compared with up to 30 percent of the primary service area households, confirms that local persons in the higher income categories responded to this survey. It is also interesting to note that 66 percent of the responses to this question indicate their households earn more than \$30,000 annually, which appears to be far a greater percentage than the average household income in any of the primary service areas and is not far below the national average.

The fifth and final demographic question asked respondents to identify their ethnicity. Out of 434 responses to this question, 81 percent identified themselves as White, 15 percent identified themselves as Native American, and four percent identified themselves as Hispanic, Asian or Other. According to 2000 U.S. Census Bureau data, just over 71 percent of the Lake County population and 68 percent of the Flathead Indian Reservation residents identified themselves as White. This points to the conclusion that a disproportionate percentage of people who responded to this survey question identify themselves as White. One reason for the disproportionate response could be the Elmo, north Pablo and Arlee areas did not receive questionnaires and these areas have sizeable numbers of Native American residents.

Aquatic Recreation Participation

Question number six can be broken down into four separate parts. The first part asked whether the respondents or a member of their household swam during the previous 12 months. Of the 509 responses to this question, 77 percent of the respondents indicated the answer is yes while 23 percent indicated the answer is no. The 77 percent affirmative response rate greatly surpasses any of the studies evaluating swimming participation that are cited in Chapter I. This could be due to a number of factors including the high quality, low cost lake access in the Polson and Mission Valley area, as well as the fact that aquatic recreation survey respondents are more likely to be swimmers than the national or statewide populations.

The second part of question number six asked respondents to identify the general locations at which they swam during the past 12 months. A total of 390 responses to this question were submitted and respondents could indicate they swam in more than one location. The following table shows the types of swimming locations cited by respondents, the number of individual responses for each water body and a percentage breakdown.

Table II-3

Water Bodies, Number, and the Percent of Respondents Indicating They Swam in a Particular Type of Water Body

Water Bodies	Number of Responses for Each Water Body	Percent of Responses for Each Water Body
Lake, Pond or River	312	80%
Hotel Pool	248	64%
Private Pool	73	19%
Health Club Pool	53	13%
Public Pool	47	12%
Other	37	10%
Ronan (Boys and Girls Club) Pools	7	5%

As the above table indicates, the vast majority of respondents to question number seven indicated they or a household member swam in a lake, pond or river during the past year, which is not surprising given the natural resources in the area. What is surprising is the number of respondents who indicated they swam at hotels, private pools, health clubs and public pools. This is surprising because the KwaTaqNuk resort in Polson is the only hotel in the Mission Valley with a pool and it is a relatively small one. Also, there are relatively few private pools and no health clubs or public pools in the immediate area. This points to the conclusion that many of the respondents swam while visiting other areas. However, it is not clear whether they traveled to other destinations in order to swim or simply happened to swim while they were in other areas.

This question also asked respondents to indicate the number of days they or a member of their household swam per location. The following table shows the responses to this portion of question number six.

Table II-4

Number of Swimmer Days by Location

Swimmer Days	Lake, Pond or Pool	Hotel Pool	Health Club	Ronan Boys and Girls Club	Private Pool	Public Pool	Other
< 10 days	86	171	36	8	34	28	16
10-20 days	97	44	5	3	16	4	8
21-30 days	55	3	2	3	5	2	4
31-40 days	12	3	2	0	2	2	1
41-50 days	16	1	1	1	2	0	0

51-60 days	11	1	2	0	2	0	1
> 60 days	18	2	1	0	5	4	2
Totals	295	225	49	15	64	40	32

The above table indicates a high level of swimming participation among questionnaire respondents. Two-hundred ninety five respondents indicated they swam in a lake, pond or pool at least once, 112 respondents indicated they swam in one of those locations more than 20 times and 29 respondents indicated they swam in those locations at least 50 times during the past year. Given the fact that most of the local swimming locations are seasonal, this seems to indicate weekly and even daily swimming among a number of the respondents. The table also shows that 225 respondents swam in hotel pools during the past year, with the majority of respondents indicating they swam there 20 times or less. As stated above, the only local hotel pool is found in Polson. This seems to indicate the respondents took advantage of swimming opportunities while visiting other locations and may point to the desire of respondents for more swimming opportunities. Again, it is not clear whether the respondents traveled to swim or simply swam while traveling.

The fourth part of question number six asked respondents if there is a particular aquatic facility they prefer and to state why they prefer using it. In addition to local swimming options such as Flathead Lake, respondents cited examples of swimming pools from Fernie, British Columbia to Salt Lake City, Utah. While it is difficult to determine trends from these responses, some reasons for enjoying particular facilities were mentioned a number of times. The most often mentioned reasons were safety, cleanliness, water temperature, attractiveness, convenient location, affordable admission price and facilities that offer multiple components such as hot tubs, saunas, water slides, locker rooms and other fitness related equipment.

The seventh question asked respondents to circle or write in what factors are preventing them and members of their household from swimming more than they do at present. As with many of the other questions on this survey, respondents could cite more than one reason. There were a total of 1,026 responses to this question and the following table shows the responses in descending order.

Table II-5

Reasons Cited for Not Swimming More

Reason Cited	Number of persons	Percent
Water is Too Cold	280	27%
No Place to Swim	273	27%
Swimmer's itch (in Flathead Lake when water is warm)	161	16%
Lack of Time/Interest	102	10%

Unsafe Conditions at Park	46	4%
Don't Know How to Swim	33	3%
Lack of Money	31	3%
Other*	25	2%
Disability	24	2%
Health Concerns	20	2%
No Transportation	8	1%

* Other reasons indicated were age, embarrassment, disinterest, travel distance, busy schedule, lack of hours pools are open and mean people.

As the above table indicates, there are a number of reasons the questionnaire respondents and members of their households do not swim more. It is interesting to note that 27 percent of the respondents indicated there is no place to swim. Given the high quality and low cost access to area lakes, this could mean there is no place to swim during the majority of the year, which relates with the answer describing the local waters as too cold. Many of the respondents cited reasons that could be overcome by a safe, affordable and well programmed aquatic facility such as not knowing how to swim, lack of money, disability and a lack of transportation.

Question number eight asked respondents to indicate how often they would visit an aquatic facility if one were located within 20 minutes of their home. Of the 480 responses to this question, 202 respondents (42 percent) indicated they would visit more than once per week, 175 respondents (36 percent) indicated they would visit more than once per month, 51 respondents (11 percent) indicated they would visit more than once per year, and 52 respondents (11 percent) indicated they would never visit an aquatic facility. Based on the responses to this question alone, it can be conservatively estimated that 24,500 local visitors would like to use an aquatic facility on an annual basis. However, it is important to consider that only a small portion of the local population responded to the questionnaire and these figures do not take into account users from outside of the area.

Activities and Programming Options

The purpose of question number nine was to determine what aquatic programs people are most interested in. Specifically, the question asked respondents to identify what types of water-related activities they or members of their household would like to participate in. A total of 1,565 responses were given to this question on the 519 surveys mailed in. The responses are broken down by the type of program/activity, number of responses and the percentage of respondents who identified the specific activities in the following table.

Table II-6

Water Related Programs and Activities

Type of Program/Activity	Number of	Percentage
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	Responses	
Open/Family Swim	291	56%
Aqua Aerobics	230	44%
Lap Swimming	194	37%
Swimming Lessons	162	31%
Physical Therapy	138	27%
Canoe/Kayak Training	101	19%
Pool Rentals	94	18%
Scuba Diver Training	76	15%
Water Safety Training	68	13%
Youth and High School Competition	62	12%
Water Polo	49	9%
Diving	42	8%
Adult Competition	26	5%
Synchronized Swimming	19	4%
Other*	13	3%

*Other activities cited were special times for seniors, general exercise, water volleyball, fishing, exercise for handicapped persons, snorkeling training and water aerobics for middle-aged people.

The respondents to this question stated they and members of their household would like to take part in a wide variety of activities and the top four choices are geared toward a wide variety of age groups. Open/family swim is generally geared toward youth and adults, aqua aerobics participants are usually adult women, lap swimmers are usually adults and swimming lessons are most often targeted toward youth. This leads to the conclusion that the respondents and their families would like to use an aquatic facility for many different purposes, which is essential to keep visitors coming through the door and for long term sustainability.

Facility Features

Question number 10 asked respondents to identify what features other than a swimming pool they would they like to use. Respondents could put a check mark next to a number of choices and write in their preferences. The 519 surveys contained 1,447 total responses to this question. The most often cited features were a hot tub, warm water therapy pool, sauna/steam room and children’s play features. Table II-7 shows a breakdown of the responses by number and percentage.

Table II-7

Preferred Facility Features, In Addition to a Pool

Facility Feature	Number of Responses	Percentage
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Hot Tub	189	36%
Warm Water Therapy Pool	185	35%
Sauna/Steam Room	146	28%
Children's Play Features	145	28%
Weight Room	125	24%
Water Slides	116	22%
Aerobic/Dance Room	109	21%
Concessions/Snack Bar	99	19%
Diving Board	96	18%
Raquetball Courts	85	16%
Gymnasium	69	12%
Swim Shop	45	9%
Meeting Rooms/Offices	28	5%
Other*	10	2%

*Other features included yoga classes, changing rooms, showers, lockers, a zero-depth entry area, rock climbing wall and a fish tank.

Facility Financing

The final section of the questionnaire was designed to solicit information regarding the potential financing of an aquatic facility. Because user fees typically make up a sizeable portion of recreational facility revenues, question number 11 asked respondents to indicate the maximum amount they would be willing to pay per adult visit to an indoor aquatic facility. There were 442 responses submitted to this question. As shown on the following table, 75 percent of the respondents indicated they would pay between \$3 and \$5 per adult visit to an indoor aquatic facility.

Table II-8

Maximum Cost per Adult Visit

Cost	Number of Responses	Percentage
\$2	71	16%
\$3	107	24%
\$4	85	19%
\$5	140	32%
\$6	17	4%
\$8	22	5%

Question number 12 asked respondents to indicate what level of tax-deductible contribution they would be willing to make for the establishment of an aquatic facility. A total of 348 respondents said they would be willing to donate to the cause in varying

amounts. This figure represents 67 percent of the overall survey respondents. The results are presented in the following table.

Table II-9

Voluntary Contributions

Amount	Overall	Polson	Ronan	Elsewhere
\$20-100	239	196	40	3
\$101-500	89	69	11	9
\$501-1,000	15	12	1	2
\$1,001-5,000	3	2	0	1
\$5,001-10,000	1	1	0	0
\$10,001-15,000	0	0	0	0
\$15,001-20,000	0	0	0	0
Over \$20,000	1	0	0	1 (Pablo)
Total	348	280	52	16

The results shown on the above table indicate there is a substantial local voluntary contributor base. The contributor base is particularly strong in the Polson area, which provided 80 percent of the affirmative responses. Again, it must be noted that a number of area households did not receive questionnaires. However, if all of the contributions are most conservatively tallied, the respondents indicated they would be willing to contribute over \$90,000 in cash to the effort. Although this amount constitutes only a small portion of the total costs for an aquatic facility, at this early stage in the project it provides a promising start. As a side note, as of November 2004, Mission Valley Aquatics has received almost \$40,000 in pledges from local residents.

The final question asked respondents if they would be willing to support a public recreational bond to help build and maintain an aquatic facility. A total of 450 responses were submitted to this question on the 519 questionnaires and the following table breaks down the responses by answer and the location of the respondents who answered this question.

Table II-10

Those for and Against a Public Bond for Aquatic Facility Construction and Maintenance

Answer	Percentage	Polson	Ronan	Other Location
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Yes	371 (82%)	261	46	64
No	79 (18%)	56	12	11
Total	450	317	58	75

A number of respondents commented on this question and the comments varied widely. Some stated they would only be willing to support a bond if the facility were built in their immediate area. Others stated they would support a bond if the proposed facility was not too upscale or if tax payers received a reduced visitation fee. A number of respondents also indicated they would not support a public recreational bond under any circumstances. While the percentage of affirmative responses is very high, it is important to consider that those interested in aquatic recreation were most likely to complete and mail in the questionnaire. Also, only 450 out of 519 respondents answered this question. Therefore, the 82 percent affirmative response rate shown above is unlikely to be representative of overall tax payer sentiment.

Another way to evaluate the responses to this question is to determine the annual household income of respondents to see if any trends emerge. Of the 450 respondents to this question, 407 also responded to question number four, which asked for annual household income. Table II-11 shows a break down of the responses to this question by income.

Table II-11

Bond Supporters and Opponents by Annual Household Income.

Income	Number of Bond Supporters	Number of Bond Opponents
\$0 - \$10,000	18	4
\$10,001 - \$20,000	41	14
\$20,001 - \$30,000	51	11
\$30,001 - \$40,000	56	16
\$40,001 - \$50,000	45	8
\$50,001 - \$60,000	51	6
\$60,000 plus	89	5

As one might guess, the largest group of supporters includes those representing households with the highest annual household income. Almost 95 percent of the respondents in the \$60,000+ annual income category indicated they were willing to support a public recreational bond. This group also responded to the question in the

highest overall proportion. What is unclear from the results of this portion of the survey is if the overall tax payers would be willing to support a public recreational bond.

Summary

General Questionnaire Notes

1. The questionnaire was distributed to 12,500 of the 16,000 Mission Valley Power account holders. The places surveys were not mailed to include the area from south of Polson to north of Pablo as well as the Elmo, Big Arm, Dayton, Charlo and Arlee areas.
2. The questionnaire had a four percent response rate. This rate is not considered to be statistically significant so the results should not be interpreted to represent the sentiments of the total local population. However, the response rate is not a bad one for a mail-in survey.
3. The responses are heavily weighted in favor of Polson area respondents.
4. The questionnaires were disproportionately completed by respondents who identified their ethnicity as White, have relatively high educational attainment and annual household income levels.
5. The percentage of children, parent-age adults and older adults identified by the respondents is generally representative of the age distribution of the local population as a whole.

Swimming Participation

6. Seventy seven percent of the respondents indicated they or a member of their household swam during the past 12 months, with many respondents indicating they swam numerous times during the previous year. This percentage greatly surpasses statewide and national swimming participation rates and is likely due to the presence of high-quality and affordable local swimming opportunities well as the fact that aquatic recreation survey respondents are more likely to be swimmers than the national or statewide populations as a whole.
7. Eighty percent of the questionnaire respondents indicated they or a household member swam in a lake river or pond during the previous year, which is not surprising given the available local natural water bodies. However, 64 percent of the respondents indicated they or a household member swam in a hotel pool, which is surprising given that fact that only one local hotel has a swimming pool. It is not clear whether the respondents traveled to other destinations in order to swim or simply happened to swim while they were in other areas but this may point toward the conclusion that there is a

sizeable segment of the respondents who would like to see increased swimming opportunities.

8. Based only on the responses to this questionnaire, a very conservative estimate of the number of potential visitors to an aquatic facility is 24,500 annual visitors. However, it is important to consider that only a small portion of the local population responded to the questionnaire and these figures do not take into account users from outside of the area. Therefore, actual annual visitation rates could be significantly higher.

9. The most often cited barriers to increased swimming participation were cold water temperature, the lack of swimming facilities, swimmer's itch and the lack of time or interest. Most of the other barriers to increased swimming participation could be overcome by a safe, affordable and well programmed aquatic facility.

Aquatic Facility Features and Activities

10. Questionnaire respondents cited safety, cleanliness, warm water temperature, overall attractiveness, convenient location, affordable admission price, and facilities that offer multiple components (hot tubs, saunas, water slides, locker rooms and other fitness related equipment) for reasons they enjoyed particular swimming facilities.

11. Besides a swimming pool, the most often cited features respondents stated they would like to take advantage of were a hot tub, a warm water therapy pool, a sauna/steam room and children's play features.

12. The top five activities respondents would like to participate in are open/family swim, aqua aerobics, lap swimming, swimming lessons and physical therapy. These activities typically serve a wide range of age groups and abilities.

Aquatic Facility Financing

13. Seventy-five percent of the respondents indicated they would pay between \$3 and \$5 per adult visit to an indoor aquatic facility.

14. Sixty-seven percent of the respondents and 80 percent of Polson-area respondents indicated they would be willing to make a tax-deductible contribution to the construction of an aquatic facility. The dollar figures they provided amounts to a conservative estimate of over \$90,000. Although this sum constitutes only a small portion of the total costs for an aquatic facility, at this early stage in the project it provides a promising start.

15. Eighty-two percent of the respondents indicated they would be willing to support a public bond for the construction and maintenance of an aquatic facility. However, those interested in aquatic recreation were most likely to complete and mail in the questionnaire so the results may not represent the feelings of the majority of local tax payers.

Choosing the right location for an aquatic facility will impact the ability to attract users and to remain viable over time. A number of factors must be considered when choosing the proper location. The factors include accessibility to the local and traveling public, physical characteristics and features of a site, costs associated with land acquisition and extending supporting infrastructure, zoning and permitting requirements and political considerations. This chapter provides a description of those factors as well as a preliminary evaluation three potential locations that have been identified by Mission Valley Aquatics

Accessibility

The site must be easily accessible to local swimmers. Because the majority of users are likely to be children and their families, the site should be within walking and bicycling distance of schools and neighborhoods to give children easy access. Ideally there would be a network of bicycle and pedestrian pathways connecting the facility with schools and neighborhoods. Because the primary service areas include more than one community, the site should be easy to find and situated near a major transportation corridor to allow for easy access to out-of-town users. Locating the facility near medical and senior citizen centers also presents an opportunity to serve rehabilitating patients and seniors who can take advantage of socially oriented, low-impact exercise facilities.

The site should also be visible to the traveling public. Although the major target market is made up of local users, passersby also present an opportunity for a potentially sustaining income source. During the summer months, visitors come to the Mission Valley from western Montana and elsewhere not only to recreate on Flathead Lake but also to visit Glacier National Park and the greater Mission Valley/Flathead area. Many of these visitors stay in the area for an extended period and are looking for recreational opportunities. Locating an attractive recreational facility along Highway 93, particularly if the design and features are centered around children's fun, increases the chances of those visitors taking a break from traveling and stopping along the way. In the event a facility cannot be located along U.S. Highway 93, advertising in tourist publications and on outdoor signs can increase the potential for travelers to visit the facility.

The future location of U.S. Highway 93 in and/or around Polson has not been determined to date. Three main alignments are currently under consideration. They are: (1) A bypass route around (south and west of) the City of Polson; (2) the current roadway location through town; and, (3) a couplet, with two southbound lanes and two northbound lanes in the vicinity of 7th Avenue. A decision on the future location of Highway 93 is tentatively scheduled to be made within the next two years, depending on the availability of federal funds. The location of U.S. Highway 93 in the Pablo area is to remain in its current alignment and the location of the highway through Ronan, although it will be expanded into a couplet with separate north and southbound lanes, will be generally similar to the current alignment.

Physical Characteristics

The site must be large enough to support the facility and a minimum of 3.5 acres can be used as a rule of thumb. This allows for placement of the facility itself, car and bus circulation, parking and loading/unloading of passengers and areas for equipment and supplies. The area should also have enough space for future expansion of the facility and compatible land uses such as a fitness gym or similar components if so desired. Landscaping is necessary to make the facility attractive and shade, provided by trees or a canopy, is essential on hot summer days if a portion of the facility is outdoors. Ideally the site would be shielded from cold winds (barriers can be constructed if necessary) and have attractive views of the surrounding area.

A geotechnical analysis is critical to determining the suitability of a site for an aquatic facility. Different subsurface characteristics such as the presence of groundwater, load bearing ability and the shrinking and swelling potential of soils could make an apparently good site unusable, or at least add substantially to the construction and long-term maintenance costs. Ideally the topography would be generally level to reduce excavation and grading costs, although the facility could have two levels if built into a hillside. Also, because permanent structures are generally not permitted within a floodplain, the site should be evaluated for flooding potential. Another item to consider is the past land use on the site. A professional evaluation of the presence or absence of hazardous materials in the soils is a cost that is necessary to incur in order to avoid potential liability problems in the future.



Land and Infrastructure Costs

One of the most important issues in choosing a site is the cost of land. Parcels of land along major transportation corridors tend to be priced for commercial use, which would present a major hurdle for a young organization like Mission Valley Aquatics. Land owned by a city, county, college, school district or park district, or given by a private donor, would provide a substantial benefit due to the reduction in front end costs. If land is to be purchased, an appraisal of the land's value is essential.

Because Mission Valley Aquatics is a tax-exempt organization, land donors could receive substantial tax benefits. Such donors may be hard to find and potential donors must be extensively courted. However, once the project gains momentum and tangible results are seen, finding the right donor will become easier. A long-term, low cost lease is another option where a public entity or private landholder could realize benefits from leasing a site to a non-profit organization. In any case, a title search should be done on the parcel to determine if there are lien holders on a property, the location of access or utility easements and other factors that are not readily apparent.

In order to keep construction costs down, the site could share parking space with a school, church or other large facility. This would also allow for parking lot maintenance

and lighting costs to be absorbed by more than one entity. During summer afternoons when the number of visitors to an aquatic facility is likely to be greatest, the potential for parking lot overuse would be minimized if the parking area is shared with a school or church.

The presence of and distance from existing water, sewer, electrical and telephone infrastructure is also a major consideration when choosing an appropriate site. In order to serve an aquatic facility, municipal water and sewer facilities are generally sought as opposed to individual, on-site water and wastewater systems. The cost of extending sewer and water infrastructure is generally related to the distance from existing mains and the terrain. For example, if wastewater must be pumped uphill, a lift station may be necessary and the cost will increase substantially. The costs of relocating existing utilities from their current placement should also be avoided if at all possible.

As of the fall of 2004, the City of Polson has sewer capacity but has limited water capacity. The Pablo Water and Sewer District also lacks sewer capacity but has the water capacity to support an aquatic facility. Both entities are pursuing technical studies and grant funding to expand their service capabilities. The City of Ronan currently has both the sewer and water capacity to serve an aquatic facility. The Polson City Council, the Pablo Water and Sewer District Board and the Ronan Public Works Department have stated they support the concept of building an aquatic facility in their areas but their ability to provide water and sewer service will depend on the capacity of those systems at the time of development.

Another potential infrastructure cost relates to public roadway approaches. Access onto a busy thoroughfare may require upgrades such as turning lanes or even streetlights. These costs are generally absorbed by the entity seeking to gain access and can cost \$100,000 or more. Therefore, investigating road approach improvement requirements at the outset is an important step. As with many of the other infrastructure improvements mentioned above, sharing a road approach with another party may allow Mission Valley Aquatics to reduce the cost of building and maintaining roadway infrastructure.

Planning, Zoning and Permitting

The City of Polson and Lake County maintain a cooperative planning area and set of zoning regulations in and around Polson. The City is embarking on a comprehensive planning process and now is the perfect time for Mission Valley Aquatics to work with the city planners to designate a location for an aquatic facility if Polson is to be the area of choice. An update to the zoning regulations is sure to follow the comprehensive planning process and it would be much easier to designate an area for an aquatic facility earlier rather than later.

There is no zoning in effect in the Pablo area. Lake County maintains planning authority outside of the incorporated towns on fee status (non-tribal trust) land and the Lake County Growth Policy does not designate land uses. The City of Ronan also is scheduled to begin a comprehensive planning process and update its zoning regulations. Generally

zoning regulations allow for different land uses ranging from residential to commercial and industrial, depending on where the site is located. Zoning regulations also cover the placement and size of advertising signs. Within the City of Polson, the zoning regulations are administered by the Polson Planning Department and outside of the City limits the zoning regulations are administered by the Lake County Planning Department. The City of Ronan administers its own zoning regulations. All permits require processing fees and Mission Valley Aquatics should seek exemptions from permit fees due to its non-profit status.



Building permits would be required for an aquatic facility no matter where it is located. Within the Cities of Polson and Ronan, local officials would issue building permits pertaining to structural characteristics, accessibility, fire suppression and sewer and water hookups. The Montana Department of Commerce Building Codes Division would issue permits for the electrical, plumbing and mechanical components. Outside of the City limits, the Montana Department of Commerce Building Codes Division would issue permits for all of the above except for sewer and water, which would be issued by Lake County.

Road approach permits are also required for access onto public streets. For approaches onto U.S. Highway 93, the Montana Department of Transportation is the governing authority. The City of Polson, Ronan and Lake County issue approach permits within their respective jurisdictional areas.

Political Considerations

Political considerations having to do with the location of an aquatic facility should not be under appreciated but are probably the most difficult factor to measure. As anyone in the Mission Valley can attest, rivalries exist between the local communities, particularly between Ronan and Polson. If an aquatic facility is built in Polson, will residents from the southern Mission Valley communities come? If one is built in Ronan or Pablo, will Polson residents use it? While this feasibility study cannot pinpoint the degree of participation from out-of-town users, there are a few variables that Mission Valley Aquatics can identify and should address in order to choose the location that will serve the most users and be the most likely to receive political and financial support in the coming years.

The largest segment of the Tribal population in the Mission Valley lives in and around the communities of Pablo, Ronan and St. Ignatius. In discussions with representatives of Salish Kootenai College, the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes and the Salish Kootenai Housing Authority during June of 2004, they pointed to the fact that a large number of Tribal youths, some of whom can be termed at-risk, could stand to benefit

from the presence of an aquatic facility with a fun, safe, constructive and supervised environment. Although during the discussions it was not stated outright, it seemed apparent that locating a facility in the Pablo or Ronan areas would be likely to bring greater Tribal support than building a facility in the Polson area. Specific areas of support mentioned were providing grant writing and administration services, providing construction equipment and labor, donating land or leasing land at little cost and sharing the costs associated with infrastructure building and maintenance. It seems unlikely the Tribal government entities would not participate if an aquatic facility were constructed in Polson, although it could be politically more advantageous for them to commit Tribal resources if one were built in Pablo or Ronan.

There is the perception in the non-Tribal segment of the Mission Valley community that Tribal members do not pay taxes. In fact, Tribal members do pay federal taxes, but not state property taxes. Concern exists among the non-Tribal population that if a mil levy were to be assessed against property owners to build and/or support operation and maintenance costs of an aquatic facility, the Tribal users would get to use the facility at a subsidized rate. In order to alleviate this concern, wherever an aquatic facility is built, Mission Valley Aquatics should seek agreements with the entities of the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes to ensure Tribal financial and/or in-kind participation in order to convince local property tax payers that all parties would pay a proportionate share.

The concern also exists that if an aquatic facility were constructed in the Pablo or Ronan areas, participation from the Polson community would be limited. This could be dealt with in a number of ways. If the facility were attractive, well maintained, activities were supervised with sufficient staffing levels and there was an array of programming choices to serve youths and adults, people from all over the Mission Valley would be likely to participate. The Polson and Ronan/Pablo school district superintendents have expressed support for an aquatic facility, although are unable to commit to funding at present. Over time a valley-wide competitive swimming program could be developed to compete with swim teams from the upper Flathead, Missoula, Bozeman and other relatively large population centers. This model already exists with the Mission Valley Mariners baseball team, where boys from all over the valley compete against teams from other areas. If an indoor facility is built, physical education classes from the Polson and Ronan/Pablo school districts could also use the facility for swimming lessons and water sports. Equally important, there should be an organized transportation system in place to bring youths from different areas of the valley to and from an aquatic facility in order to break down the town-versus-town rivalry barrier that seems to exist.

Introductory Evaluation of Potential Sites

Three parcels of land have been preliminarily identified for the location of an aquatic facility. They are the Old Dupuis Lumber Mill in Polson, the Montana Rail Link property in Polson and an undeveloped parcel of land south of Salish Kootenai College in Pablo. The following pages provide a brief introductory evaluation of each of the parcels. Tables with the essential criteria to evaluate the sites are also provided as a

starting point. These tables can be expanded and modified in the future should the project progress past the stage of this feasibility study.

It is important to note there are a number of other potential sites in the Mission Valley area that should be considered. The 60-acre+ Tribal and Lake County owned area west of the City of Ronan is one such site that would provide for cost sharing and collaboration between the two governments and Mission Valley Aquatics. There may be other such sites as well. Each location will provide opportunities and constraints and the evaluation presented below is intended to be a starting point in the search for an appropriate location.

Old Dupuis Lumber Mill property

The Old Dupuis Lumber Mill property is located at the southern entrance to Polson along the west side of U.S. Highway 93. It consists of seven parcels of land and, as the name implies, was historically used as a lumber mill. Students from the Kicking Horse Job Corps have recently used the area to develop their heavy equipment operating skills. The land is owned by a private party and is located in the southeast ¼ of Section 11, Township 22 North, Range 20 West.

The owners are in the early stages of developing the land for commercial and residential purposes and have stated they may be willing to donate a portion of the property for an aquatics facility. The land fronts upon U.S. Highway 93 and is highly visible from that travel corridor. It will have a walking and pedestrian pathway along its highway frontage as part of highway upgrades that are scheduled to begin in 2005. The pathway is currently designed to connect the communities of Ronan, Pablo and Polson. Although the property does not contain a publicly developed access to the west, upon development an extension of a number of City streets is likely. Such road extensions would link the property to the developed neighborhoods of Polson as well as the high school, middle school and St. Joseph's medical complex.

Looking northeast toward Flathead Lake and the Mission Mountains from the northern portion of the Old Dupuis Lumber Mill site

The area is well over 100 acres in size and could easily support an aquatics facility while providing room for future expansion. The area is exposed to the west, north and east, but is protected by a glacial moraine to the south. Views from the property of Flathead Lake and the Mission Mountains are impressive. The soils composition on the property varies and past land uses may have included the use of hazardous materials. Therefore, geotechnical and environmental analyses are warranted. Much of the terrain is level and no floodplains exist on the property.

The land is currently outside of the Polson City limits but because the owners are pursuing the development of the property and will annex into the City, there is a clear potential to share sewer, water, electrical and telephone extension costs. Residential or commercial development is also likely to trigger an upgrade to the Highway 93 approach,

which could reduce the site improvement costs to Mission Valley Aquatics. If other commercial operations are proposed along the highway frontage, the possibility also exists for shared parking and lighting.

The following table presents a preliminary evaluation of the site and includes criteria necessary to evaluate and compare potential sites for an aquatic facility. The table does not weigh the different criteria and some may be more important than others. If or when Mission Valley Aquatics has further defined potential site options, weighing of the criteria may prove advantageous in order to make a more informed decision.

Table III-1

Old Dupuis Lumber Mill property

Criteria	Yes	No	Comments
Access			
Walking/biking distance to neighborhoods and schools?	x		When larger property is developed.
Non-motorized pathway links?	x		When MDT builds path.
On or near major transportation corridors?	x		Highway 93 frontage.
Near medical facilities?	x		Five minutes from St. Joe's.
Near senior citizen centers?	x		Five minutes from senior center.
Highly visible location?	x		
Physical Characteristics			
Adequate size?	x		
Room for additional expansion?	x		Depending on the wishes of the owner.
Attractive views?	x		
Suitable soils?			Unknown at present
Generally level terrain?	x		
Floodplain issues?		x	
Past land use/hazardous materials issues?			Potential for haz. materials
Compatible with surrounding area?	x		Commercial to the east, residential to north, west and south.
Costs			
Affordable land?			If owners are willing to donate land.
Clear title to the land?			Unknown at present.

Shared parking?			Potentially.
Availability of water and sewer infrastructure?		x	Water and sewer will be available in the future.
Costs to extend water, sewer, power and phone?	x		Possible shared costs.
Costs to upgrade public roadway approach?	x		Possible shared costs.
Zoning and Permits			
Allowable land use under zoning regulations?	x		Special use permit required.
Building and sanitation permits required?	x		
Floodplain permit required?		x	
Road approach permit?	x		Possible upgrade required.

The zoning designation on the northeast portion of the property is highway commercial and the designation on the southern and southeastern portions of the property is rural-residential. In either case, a special use permit would have to be obtained through the Polson City-County Planning Board for the development of an aquatic facility. Structural, plumbing and mechanical permits would be issued through the State of Montana and sanitation permits would be issued through the Lake County Environmental Health Department.

As of the fall of 2004, the Old Dupuis Lumber Mill site looks very promising due to the access and visibility from Highway 93, the planned pedestrian and bicycle pathway, potential future links to the residential neighborhoods of Polson, the size of the site, and the potential for donation of the land and infrastructure cost sharing. However, a number of questions and outstanding issues exist. The building of an aquatic facility on the property would have to coincide with the subdivision and development of the site as a whole in order to reap the benefits of sharing infrastructure costs. The timing of the overall site development is currently unknown and may depend on when the City of Polson can provide water to the site. Outstanding questions like the suitability of the soils, presence of hazardous materials, development timing and clear land title would have to be investigated if this site is a real option for Mission Valley Aquatics.

Montana Rail Link property

The Montana Rail Link (MRL) property is centrally located in Polson between 7th Avenue to the north, Division Avenue to the south and First Street East to the west. The property is located in the commercial/industrial portion of Polson and the area was used as a rail yard until as recently as 2003. The area currently appears unused except for a makeshift skateboard park on a concrete pad. The railroad tracks have been removed. The land is owned by MRL, a transportation company owned by the Washington

Companies. The total area consists of approximately 22 acres and is divided into at least two parcels of land. The area can be legally described as a portion of the north ½, northeast ¼, northeast ¼ of section 9 and a portion of the north ½, northwest ¼, northwest ¼ of section 10, township 22 north, range 20 west.

The surrounding area is generally industrial in nature. Adjacent land uses include a commercial and industrial cluster to the south, residential homes and an electrical power facility to the north, residential homes and industrial development to the east and a fuel depot to the west. However, the site is close to residential neighborhoods, downtown businesses and has good roadway access. Views from the site are not particularly attractive, although the Mission Mountains are visible to the east.

According to Mission Valley Aquatics board and committee members, MRL does not currently have development plans for the property although, given its central location in a quickly growing community, development of the property over next ten years seems likely. MRL representatives have reportedly stated they intend to perform an environmental investigation and basic clean-up (removal of concrete structures) in the near future, and may be in the process of forming development plans. A number of community groups and the Lake County government have expressed interest in this site.

The land is owned by a corporation and unless MRL would be willing to donate or lease the land under favorable conditions, an outright purchase may be prohibitively expensive. The property is centrally located and highly visible in the surrounding community, but not from a major travel corridor. To access the property from U.S. Highway 93, vehicles would have to pass through the residential neighborhoods along Hillcrest Drive or travel south through the central business district. High volume traffic would impact the nearby residences during the summer months but could be of benefit to downtown businesses. The old rail bed leading to and existing on the property is ripe for conversion to a pedestrian and bicycle path, although no efforts are currently underway to make that transition. However, there are infrastructure grants and Montana Department of Transportation Community Transportation Enhancement Program funds that can be used for such a project and the City of Polson and Lake County are well positioned to make this happen.

The Polson Economic Development Association prepared an urban renewal design plan in 1998 for the railyard and other blighted areas of town. The plan calls for a mixture of residential and clean commercial and industrial development in the area and stresses working with MRL to clean up the property. Developing an aquatic facility on the parcel would help to implement the urban renewal plan. The property is currently zoned for commercial and industrial use. However, the City of Polson is preparing to begin a comprehensive planning process which will include an update of the zoning regulations. It seems likely this land could be zoned for recreational and community uses if all parties agree this is a good location for such an activity. Structural, plumbing and mechanical permits would be issued through the State of Montana and sanitation permits would be issued through the Lake County Environmental Health Department.

The following table presents a preliminary evaluation of the MRL site in relation to the criteria necessary to evaluate and compare potential sites for an aquatic facility.

Table III-2

Montana Rail Link property

Criteria	Yes	No	Comments
Access			
Walking/biking distance to neighborhoods and schools?	x		
Non-motorized pathway links?		x	Potential for pathway along old rail bed
On or near major transportation corridors?		x	Access through central business district.
Near medical facilities?	x		Five minutes from St. Joe's.
Near senior citizen centers?	x		Five minutes from senior center.
Highly visible location?	x		Not visible to Highway traffic but in central Polson.
Physical Characteristics			
Adequate size?	x		
Room for additional expansion?	x		Depending on the wishes of the owner.
Attractive views?		x	
Suitable soils?			Unknown at present
Generally level terrain?	x		
Floodplain issues?		x	
Past land use/hazardous materials issues?			Potential for haz. materials
Compatible with surrounding area?		x	Mostly industrial development nearby.
Costs			
Affordable land?			If owners are willing to donate land or lease at low-cost.
Clear title to the land?			Unknown at present.
Shared parking?			Depends on other future land uses.
Availability of water and sewer infrastructure?		x	Water and sewer will be available in the future.
Costs to extend water, sewer, power and	x		Possible shared costs.

phone?			
Costs to upgrade public roadway approach?	x		Possible shared costs.
Zoning and Permits			
Allowable land use under zoning regulations?		x	Zoning amendment possible.
Building and sanitation permits required?	x		
Floodplain permit required?		x	
Road approach permit?	x		Possible upgrade required.

In summary, a preliminary review of the MRL property shows the parcel could be a good location for an aquatic facility due to its central location, size, terrain, the potential for a future bicycle and pedestrian pathway leading to the land and the potential for shared infrastructure when development occurs. However, there are also a number of drawbacks and unknowns, including the willingness of MRL to donate or reasonably price the land, surrounding land uses and views, the potential for hazardous materials on site and other factors.

Salish Kootenai College Property

Salish Kootenai College (SKC) owns a number of sizeable parcels of land in Pablo south of the main college campus on the east side of U.S. Highway 93. According to Dr. Joe McDonald, President of the college, SKC has obtained a \$350,000 grant to construct a fitness center on the land that will include a fitness room with weights and other equipment, rest rooms and locker rooms. SKC intends to begin construction in 2005. They hope to add onto the fitness center in the future with a gymnasium and Dr. McDonald stated SKC would be glad to consider incorporating an aquatic facility with the fitness center. Combining an aquatic facility with a fitness center presents a unique opportunity to reach a larger number of participants and family members who would make use of at least one or both components of a larger facility.

The area for the location of the fitness center is east of U.S. Highway 93 and is in the southwest ¼ of Section 12, Township 21 North, Range 20 West. The future alignment of U.S. Highway 93 in the Pablo area is planned to remain in its current location, although the roadway will be expanded with separated northbound and southbound travel lanes. The road approach to reach the parcel from the highway will be upgraded when the new roadway is constructed, which is scheduled to begin in 2005. Access to the parcel should be excellent upon highway reconstruction. A pedestrian and bicycle path is incorporated into the highway design that will link Polson, Pablo and Ronan on the west side of the highway. Visibility to the parcel is excellent from the highway and views of the surrounding area are attractive.

Public and Tribal schools and residential neighborhoods are located on both sides of the highway and safe road crossings are incorporated into the highway design. Other nearby land uses include the Tribal college and Tribal government facilities to the north, a golf course to the east, a gas station/convenience store to the north, agricultural land to the south and the Tribal Complex to the west. The nearest medical and senior care facilities are located in Ronan, approximately five miles to the south.

As shown on the photo of the SKC site, the parcel is contains mild terrain. Soils in the area are generally sandy loams and relatively high groundwater exists in the Pablo area, although the land is not within a recognized floodplain. A soils investigation would have to be conducted to determine the suitability of the site for an aquatic facility. Past land uses on the parcel are believe to be agricultural, although a more thorough evaluation is advisable to determine the presence or absence of hazardous materials. The parcel is within the Pablo Water and Sewer Districts and the Districts have voiced general support for an aquatic facility in their area. As of the fall of 2004, the districts have water capacity to serve the land but do not have sewer capacity. The engineer for the Districts is in the process of designing additional capacity and is seeking funding sources for construction.

Due to SKC’s plans to build a fitness center on the site, soils investigation costs, along with costs associated with parking lots, utility extensions, lighting and potentially locker room and restroom facilities could be shared. Facility maintenance is a possible item that could also be shared with the college. A written agreement that details lease terms and the responsibilities of SKC and Mission Valley Aquatics would be necessary to have in place prior to construction. The area is not zoned so no land use permits would be necessary. Structural, plumbing and mechanical permits would be issued through the State of Montana and sanitation permits would be issued through the Lake County Environmental Health Department. The following table presents a preliminary evaluation of the SKC site to provide a suitable location to construct an aquatic facility.

Table III-3

SKC property

Criteria	Yes	No	Comments
Access			
Walking/biking distance to neighborhoods and schools?	x		
Non-motorized pathway links?	x		Upon highway reconstruction.
On or near major transportation corridors?	x		Highway 93 frontage.
Near medical facilities?	x		Between Polson and Ronan.
Near senior citizen centers?	x		Between Polson and Ronan.

Highly visible location?	x		
Physical Characteristics			
Adequate size?	x		
Room for additional expansion?	x		Depending upon negotiations with SKC.
Attractive views?	x		
Suitable soils?			Unknown at present
Generally level terrain?	x		
Floodplain issues?		x	
Past land use/hazardous materials issues?			Unknown at present
Compatible with surrounding area?	x		
Costs			
Affordable land?	x		Depending upon negotiations with SKC.
Clear title to the land?			Unknown at present
Shared parking?	x		Potentially.
Availability of water and sewer infrastructure?	x		Upon upgrade.
Costs to extend water, sewer, power and phone?	x		Potential to share costs.
Costs to upgrade public roadway approach?		x	MDT will upgrade approach.
Zoning and Permits			
Allowable land use under zoning regulations?	x		
Building and sanitation permits required?	x		
Floodplain permit required?		x	
Road approach permit?		x	

Upon initial evaluation, the parcel owned by SKC looks very promising for the construction of an aquatic facility for a number of reasons. The potential for shared infrastructure and facility costs, highway visibility, proximity to residential neighborhoods and schools, along with significant Tribal support, all point toward a viable location. Unknown factors such as the subsurface soils suitability and the terms of negotiated agreements between SKC and Mission Valley Aquatics should be investigated further. On the downside, the immediate Pablo area is a smaller population center than both Polson and Ronan, with approximately 1,900 people in Pablo compared with around 5,000 for the immediate Polson area and 2,500 for the immediate Ronan area. In light of

this, an organized transportation system from those communities would be central to long-term sustainability of an aquatic center in Pablo. The political issues surrounding locating a facility in Pablo should not be underestimated but could be overcome with attractive design, effective operation of the facility and programs and beneficial partnerships.

Chapter IV

Facility Options

The type of facility Mission Valley Aquatics chooses to pursue depends on the goals of the organization, the needs and desires of the community and a realistic financing package. The stated goal of Mission Valley Aquatics is to design and build a state-of-the-art indoor aquatic facility that enhances the health, fitness, safety, recreation and quality of life for Mission Valley residents. This chapter explores the types of facilities that can allow Mission Valley Aquatics to achieve that goal.

Desired Aquatic Activities

The types of activities visitors want will influence the design of an aquatic facility. Through responses to the questionnaire, Mission Valley Aquatics has established baseline knowledge about the water-related activities desired by the community. At least 10 percent of the respondents to question number nine indicated they wished to take part in the following activities: open/family swim, aqua aerobics, lap swimming, swimming lessons, physical therapy, canoe and kayak training, pool rentals and scuba diver training. These activities require specific design features, as shown on the table below. All of the activities require warm water to some degree, although physical therapy patients may require the water to be warmer than other users normally would.

Table IV-1

Activities and Necessary Pool Design Features

Activity	Design Features
Open/family swim	Zero-depth entry area for toddlers, shallow area for young children, deeper area for teenagers and adults.
Aqua aerobics	Fairly deep area (approximately 4 feet).
Lap swimming	25 yard or larger pool length.
Swimming lessons	Shallow and deeper areas.
Physical therapy	Fairly deep area, warmer water.
Canoe/kayak training	Fairly deep area, place for boaters to wash out their boats.
Pool rentals	Shallow area for young children, deeper area for teenagers and adults.
Scuba diver training	Deep area.
Water safety training	Shallow and deeper areas.
Youth and HS competition	25 yard or larger pool length, minimum of six lanes.

The activities shown above can all take place in one or two swimming pools. One pool might have a zero-depth entry and shallow pool area for toddlers. This could be

connected to a 25-yard pool that is approximately four feet deep at the shallow end and a depth of nine feet or more at the deep end. Connecting the toddler and main pools would eliminate the costs associated with separate filtration equipment. A gate or other barrier could be built so that toddlers do not enter the main pool area. The deep end of the main pool could also be used as a well located below a diving board. Scuba divers would undoubtedly prefer a deeper pool, but the cost of keeping additional water warm may prove prohibitive. A separate, warmer pool could also be built that could be used primarily for physical therapy.

*Swimming pool scuba diver training at Camp Lohikan,
Gladston, NJ*

Desired Facility Features

Respondents to the questionnaire also indicated what facility features they and members of their household would most like to use. At least 10 percent of the respondents chose the following features: A hot tub, warm water therapy pool, sauna/steam room, children's play features, weight room, water slides, aerobic/dance room, concessions/snack bar, diving board, racquetball courts and a gymnasium. While children's play features and water slides could be incorporated into a large pool area, the others require space and facilities of their own. A facility with all of these components would provide for much more than the aquatic needs of the local community.

Facility Comparison

The following paragraphs describe two types of indoor aquatic facilities. The first type of facility is a multi-component recreation center. Figure 2 is a conceptual drawing of this type of facility that was provided by Schwarz Engineering, Inc. of Kalispell, Montana. The drawing shows two separate pools. The first pool has distinct areas for toddlers, bigger kids and a four-foot deep area that could be used for aerobics, swimming lessons and therapy to some degree. (Because it is connected to the larger pool area, it would be the same temperature as the other sections.) This pool also has a water slide and children's play features. The second pool shown in the drawing is an eight-lane lap/competition pool with a deep well, two diving boards and bleachers along one side. Above the pool area is an observation deck for onlookers.

The facility includes a number of other features including meeting and activity rooms, office space, a daycare, hot tub, locker rooms/restrooms, exercise equipment rooms, four racquetball courts and space for mechanical and electrical equipment. This facility is approximately 70,000 square feet in size and, along with parking, loading and landscaped areas, occupies about 3.5 acres of land. A rough estimate of construction costs, including land acquisition, is \$6 to \$7 million. Annual operation and maintenance costs could be \$600,000 or more per year. Due to the multiple recreational components, this type of facility goes beyond the stated goal of Mission Valley Aquatics but would provide a great deal of community benefit.

Multi-component recreational facilities like this generally function in larger markets due to the costs associated with construction and operation and maintenance. However, the various features are complimentary: while the kids play in the pool or are in the daycare, mom and dad can swim laps, use exercise equipment, play racquetball or attend a meeting or class. This results in a multi-component facility being able to accommodate substantially more visitors and generate substantially more income than a single-purpose facility. However, due to the size of the market and demographic considerations, it is likely such a facility in the Mission Valley would operate at a substantial loss and would have to be supported by the tax payers. The advantage of this type of facility is it becomes a community center where families and friends congregate in a healthy environment. The disadvantage of this type of facility is the construction and ongoing operational cost.

The second type of facility is an aquatic center. The drawing labeled Figure 3 is an example of such a facility and was provided by Bitterroot Aquatics in Hamilton, Montana. This facility is more basic than a full-service recreation center. It contains a six-lane lap/competition pool, a warm water therapy pool, a hot tub and a children's pool with a zero-depth entry and children's play features at one end and a waterslide at the other. The facility also includes locker rooms, an office, a concessions area and a mechanical/electrical area.

Bitterroot Aquatics plans to build the facility in phases. Phase I, which has already been built, includes the warm water therapy pool, office space, mechanical room, locker rooms and the lap/competition pool. This pool is currently located out of doors but the building was designed to be expanded in the future. Construction costs, including legal fees, administration and project oversight but not including land acquisition, totaled \$1.8 million. Annual operation and maintenance costs amounted to 165,000 in fiscal year 2004 and are projected to increase to 195,000 in fiscal year 2005. To fund the facility, the voters passed a construction bond and approved \$75,000 per year in operational costs. The operational cost deficit will reportedly be made up through user fees, voluntary contributions and grants. When financing becomes available, Bitterroot Aquatics plans to build the children's pool and enclose the lap pool.

The advantage of this type of facility is it is much less costly to build and operate than a multi-component facility. It can fulfill the aquatic needs of the community and meet the stated goal of Mission Valley Aquatics. However, it does not generate the visitor numbers or revenue of a larger facility. Also, competition from Flathead Lake in the summer months could be substantial if the facility were located in Polson and did not provide unique programs and features. One way to approach this issue is to have a portion of the facility outdoors. Outdoor components could include waterslides, spray decks, a beach volleyball court, lawn chairs, grass and landscaping, shade and other features that are attractive to summer visitors.

The successful financing of the construction and long-term operation and maintenance of an aquatic facility is central to providing for the aquatic recreational needs of the Mission Valley community. A realistic financing package that examines potential revenues and expenditures is also necessary to court potential donors, partners and taxpayers. It is likely that a number of funding sources will be necessary to create an overall financing package. This chapter begins with some general rules of thumb and progresses to specific financing options, sample budgets and rough revenue figures for Mission Valley Aquatics to consider.

Rules of Thumb

According to recreational facility planning documents produced by national consultants as well as through discussions with a number of Montana and national aquatic facility professionals, the following general rules should be taken into account when considering financing a recreational facility:

1. In rural or small population areas like the Mission Valley, the cost recovery rate is generally 50 to 75 percent of annual expenditures. Very few facilities generate enough revenue to cover their costs.^{[11](#)}
2. The first true benchmark year of operation does not typically occur until the third full year of operation.
3. The majority of community recreation centers that are being built today are between 65,000 and 75,000 square feet. They typically include three primary components: a) A pool area with competitive and leisure amenities; b) multipurpose gymnasium space, and c) a weight training and cardiovascular equipment area. In addition, most centers also have group exercise rooms, drop-in childcare, and classroom and/or community spaces.
4. For most centers to have an opportunity to cover operating expenses with revenues, they must have a service population of at least 50,000 and have relatively high user or membership fees.
5. The cost of building an indoor facility is generally two to three times greater than the cost of building an outdoor facility.
6. The annual cost of operating and maintaining an indoor facility is generally three times greater than the cost of operating and maintaining an outdoor facility, but the revenue potential is much greater with indoor facilities due to year-round use.
7. Nearly 60 percent of the operating costs typically cover personnel services, approximately 28 percent cover contractual services, 10 percent is reserved for commodities and two percent for capital replacement.

8. Many recreation facilities have different fees for local and out-of-area residents, with out-of-town users paying between 25 to 50 percent more per visit. This is particularly important if local tax payers fund operational costs, whereby they are given a reduced rate for entry.
9. Many facilities have distinct fees for daily visits, multi-day passes and annual passes.
10. Many facilities also offer separate rates for children, seniors, adults and families. Rates for children and seniors often range between \$2 and \$4 per visit. Rates for adults range between \$3 and \$6 per visit and rates for families typically range between \$4 and \$8 per visit.
11. Most centers are open an average of 100 hours per week, with weekday hours being 6:00am to 10:00pm, Saturdays 8:00am to 8:00pm and Sundays from noon to 8:00pm.
12. The ability of a fitness, sports or recreation facility to capture a market share is based in large part on the amenities that are included in a center, local competition, the variety of amenities available, the size of the facility and the fees that are going to be charged.

Potential Revenue Sources

User fees are an obvious source of revenue for an aquatic facility once it is built. The fees must be priced high enough to generate operational revenue but not so high that they present a barrier to local users, particularly if providing healthy recreational opportunities and water safety programs for children are primary goals. In addition to user fees, a number of potential sources of funding are available, many of which can help with construction and programming costs. These include charitable contributions, in-kind services, grants, loans, leases, on-site concessions and tax payer support. The following is a discussion of each of the potential funding sources.

Charitable Contributions

Charitable contributions allow donors to make a difference in their community by supporting activities that further their values and interests and leave a legacy for future generations. Because Mission Valley Aquatics has obtained non-profit tax status, donors can contribute to the funding of an aquatic facility while reducing their annual tax burden. Such contributions often come in the form of bequests through the donor's will and include the donation of life insurance funds, retirement assets or real estate. One-time or annual contributions also allow donors to further their goals for the community and can often inspire others to contribute.

A major success story taking shape in western Montana is The Wave in Whitefish. The Wave is a public-private partnership that will result in a full fitness center with

recreation, swimming and therapy pools, a gymnasium, weight training and cardiovascular machines, racquetball courts, a day care and many other features. The facility is scheduled to open in January of 2005. The price tag is approximately \$7 million and, according to Dan Weinberg, who has supplied much of the vision and energy behind the project, over 500 businesses and individuals have pledged and contributed more than \$3.75 million as of August 30, 2004. The citizens of Whitefish are more well-healed than those of Lake County, with approximately 62 percent of the households earning more than \$35,000 per year in 1999 compared with 41 percent locally. However, an aggressive, persistent and persuasive private fundraising effort to secure local contributions is getting the job done and should be used as a model by Mission Valley Aquatics.

During a discussion with Mr. Weinberg, he stated that it is imperative to have a substantial sum in hand prior to courting large donors. He said donors typically want to see there is already momentum for the project before contributing. He also suggested chartering a bus or plane and taking potential donors, bankers, local officials and influential citizens on a tour of facilities as a way to show them what their participation and leadership can bring about.

At The Wave, private parties can receive recognition for their donations in a number of ways. A threshold has been established where for a given amount, a person can have a pool or other portion of the facility named after an individual, family or business. Another common option is to sell inscribed or painted tiles, bricks or another piece of the facility. The threshold for this type of donation is usually considerably less than for the naming of a pool, and can garner considerable community support for a project.

Corporate funding sources and private charitable foundations (discussed in detail below) also provide vast sums of money annually to worthy causes. When charitable contributions of any kind are made, it is important to respect the wishes of the donor. Some donors would like to receive public recognition for their generosity. Others wish to remain anonymous. In either case, it is important to remember that the donors are giving because it fulfills their goals and the donor's wishes for recognition or anonymity must be honored.

*Water slide at Evelyn Anderson Water Park,
Pulaski County, VA*

In-kind Services

Money is the most obvious form of a charitable contribution, but other donations such as land given or leased at a reduced cost, construction materials and services and reduced price goods help lessen the bottom line costs. In-kind services can absorb a large portion of construction costs and mobilize the community to rally behind the project.

Partners must be actively recruited to provide services that are either donated or given at reduced cost. These services can include utility placement, shared physical facilities, construction materials, equipment and labor and a host of others. To date Salish Kooteni College, the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes and the Salish Kootenai Housing Authority have expressed interest in partnering with Mission Valley Aquatics by providing in-kind services. Other partners may include construction contractors, building suppliers, interior designers, lawyers and accountants, grant writers, search and rescue groups, outdoor clubs and many others. Keeping track of these efforts and providing recognition to groups and individuals for their efforts will show the public the project has momentum and will inspire ongoing partnerships.

Grants

Grants provided by federal and state government and private foundations can help to support facility building and partnerships. Many of the available grants are targeted toward communities seeking to reduce poverty and crime, support at-risk youth and parents and build partnerships among community organizations. Unfortunately, few grant programs target recreation related facilities and programs directly but a number of them support local economic development and community sustainability projects. For this feasibility study, a brief survey of grant funding opportunities was conducted. A more extensive search may bring additional funding opportunities to light. Below is a listing of several federal, state and private grant opportunities that provide the potential to absorb some of the costs of providing for the aquatic needs of the Mission Valley community.

Federal Grants

The Carol M. White Physical Education Program, funded through the Department of Education, seeks to improve youth physical education programs by providing equipment, support, staff and training. Congress appropriated \$59 million for grants through this program in fiscal year 2003. Up to 25 percent of available funds were reserved for awards to novice entities submitting high-quality applications. Applications from novice entities were read, scored, ranked, and considered for funding separately from applications submitted by non-novice eligible entities. A total of 1,365 applications were received and 256 grants were awarded. Grants ranged in size from \$100,000 to \$500,000. Ethel Jackson is a contact person who can provide more information on the program. She can be reached at the U.S. Department of Education, OESE Safe and Drug Free Schools Program, 400 Maryland Ave., S.W. Washington, DC 20202, Ethel.Jackson@ed.gov, or (202) 260-2812.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resource Conservation Service and regional Resource Conservation and Development offices provide funding and technical assistance for local governments and non-profit organizations to plan, develop and carry out projects related to economic development and community sustainability. The Resource Conservation and Development Funds program provides 50 percent matching funds for recreation, including parks and land acquisition. The

Northwest Regional Coordinator is Greg Larson, who can be contacted at P.O. Box 704, Libby, Montana (406) 293-8885 or gllarson@lclink.com.

The USDA Forest Service offers three programs designed to aid rural communities that are dependent on natural resources to help maintain rural communities. The programs are the State and Private Forestry Grants Program, the Rural Community Assistance Program and the USFS Northern Region Recreation and Tourism Strategy. The appropriate contacts are Nan Christianson (406) 363-7119, Dave Atkins (406) 329-3134 and Larry Blocker (406) 329-3134 for the respective programs.

The National Park Service administers the Rivers and Trails Conservation Assistance Program that could help Mission Valley Aquatics obtain funding for a non-motorized trail system leading to and within an aquatic facility. Information is available at <http://www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/index.html>.

State Grants

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks provides funding for trails and other recreation related programs through a Recreational Trails Program and the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The Recreational Trails Program provides at least 30 percent of its money for non-motorized trails. Information is available at <http://www.fwp.state.mt.us/search/default.aspx>. The Land and Water Conservation Fund targets outdoor recreation projects and has been used to build a number of aquatic facilities in Montana. The maximum award is \$75,000 and information is available at <http://fwp.state.mt.us/parks/landw/2004/factsheet.asp>. Contacts for the Land and Water Conservation Fund are Walt Timmerman (406) 444-3818 and Kirsten Shelton (406) 444-3753.

The Montana Department of Commerce offers a Tourism-Related Infrastructure Grant Program that provides up to \$10,000 in funding for non-profit project sponsors to facilitate the development of new tourist-related facilities and products. The program information states that the developments should strengthen Montana's attraction as a tourism destination. Victor Bjornberg is the state's current Tourism Development Director and he can be reached at (406) 841-2795 and more information is available at <http://www.travelmontana.state.mt.us/OURPROGRAMS/TourismDevEd.htm>.

The Montana Department of Transportation provides local governments with annual funding to develop non-motorized transportation systems, including walking and bicycle paths, through the Community Transportation Enhancement Program. Mission Valley Aquatics should work with Lake County and/or the Cities of Polson and Ronan to help direct these annual funds toward pathways leading to an aquatic facility from the surrounding community.

Utilizing monies authorized by the Montana Foot Path and Bicycle Trail Act of 1975, the Montana Transportation Commission spends approximately \$200,000 annually for pedestrian and bicycle pathways in areas with a demonstrated need for alternate

transportation modes. The contact for the program is Debbie Alke, (406) 444-2506 and more information is available at www.mdt.state.mt.us/aeronautics.

Non-profit and Private Sources

The Montana Community Foundation provides resources to non-profit groups as well as grant funds to community organizations for projects related to the arts, economic and community development and natural and human resources. In 2002 the Montana Community Foundation dispersed over \$900,000 to individuals and organizations, including funding for the Butte-Silver Bow playground fund. Information on resources and grants can be found at <http://www.mtcf.org/index.cfm>.

The Lower Flathead Valley Community Foundation (LFVCF) provides small grants to organizations within the Mission Valley and on the Flathead Indian Reservation. The LFVCF recently provided funding for the Boys and Girls Club of the Flathead Reservation to purchase two covered swimming pools in Ronan. The LFVCF can be reached at (406) 675-4300.

The Kresge Foundation provides funding for community development, health and education and other services and provides facility construction dollars in an effort to challenge private giving. In 2003 the Kresge Foundation awarded 142 grants worth over \$100,000,000. For more information, please see www.kresge.org.

The Ben & Jerry's Foundation, Inc. funds projects related to natural resource conservation, community development, child development, education and race relations. Grants range up to \$15,000 and must fund projects which facilitate progressive social change by addressing the underlying conditions of societal and environmental problems. Mission Valley Aquatics may be eligible for a grant from this foundation if its programs seek to bridge race gaps and provide opportunities for underprivileged youth.

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation is one of the nation's 10 largest philanthropic foundations and provides more than \$185 million annually to causes that support its goals. The foundation funds a number of programs including those related to community development and social well being. The foundation also provides below market-rate loans for community development projects. Information is available at www.macfound.org.

Other private foundations exist that may support the construction and program offerings of an aquatic facility. Mission Valley Aquatics is encouraged to investigate the foundations described above and others to develop a complete funding package.

Loans

Loans can make up a substantial (and often essential) portion of an aquatic facility funding package. Loans are generally easier to obtain than grants but Mission Valley Aquatics will have to demonstrate to any lending organization that they have a well

thought out project, financing package and widespread community support. Market-rate loans are available through many institutions but it would be advantageous for Mission Valley Aquatics to secure a low interest loan, a number of which are available from federal and federally-subsidized sources.

One example of a reduced-rate loan is a program offered by the USDA through its Montana Rural Development office. Montana Rural Development offers low-interest and guaranteed loans to non-profit organizations, public entities and tribal governments for community facilities. Interest rates are generally fixed between 4.5 and five percent over 40 years and the loans can be up to \$2 million. The key with being eligible for these loans is the facility must be a true community facility, with user groups such as the very young, teenagers, families and seniors. A wide variety of programs such as swimming lessons, advanced life saving/CPR, rescue training, supervised parties targeted toward teenagers and activities for seniors is essential for demonstrating community orientation. For more information, contact Chris Malaney at 406-829-3395, extension 107.

At The Wave, all of the banks in Whitefish have banded together to come up with a low-cost loan package. According to Dan Weinberg, the bankers recognized the value of the project to the community and wanted to play a role in the development of the facility.

Concessions

A shop that offers swimming suits, float tubes, eye wear and other goods can contribute to the annual revenue stream of an aquatic facility. Food and drink purchased on-site can also help to cover annual operational costs. According to Mike Baker, the Director of the Kalispell Parks and Recreation Department, these combined sources of revenue can generate up to 10 percent of annual costs.

Leases

Depending on the type of facility built, there is the potential for businesses to operate on-site. The Wave has leased a portion of its facility to a physical therapy office as well as a yoga and pilates business. The Wave estimates these leases will provide 10 percent of its annual operational funding. Other groups that may be appropriate to lease or rent portions of a facility are massage therapists, fitness instructors, private groups for birthday parties and individuals who seek to provide swimming lessons to the public.

Taxpayer Support

Because very few aquatic facilities are self supporting, relying on public monies to some degree seems likely. There are a number of ways for Mission Valley Aquatics to seek taxpayer support to generate revenue for the construction and operational costs of an aquatic facility. In fact, it may be necessary to receive some level of taxpayer support before private parties are willing to step forward with substantial contributions. Conversely, if Mission Valley Aquatics can demonstrate substantial cash and in-kind

pledges have already been made, it could positively influence taxpayers to support the project at the polls.

In either case, local tax payers are already burdened to some degree and household incomes are lower in the Mission Valley than in many other places. The Polson area voters are in the process of paying off debt on a stadium, which is scheduled to be retired in 2006. The Ronan/Pablo area voters are paying debt on a new middle school, which has a substantially longer life. In November of 2004, the voters of Lake County failed to approve a 20-mil increase for public safety services. This bond issue would have resulted in a \$66 per year increase for the owner of a \$100,000 home and a \$132 per year increase for the owner of a \$200,000 home. All future bond issues will be competing directly with passing a bond for an aquatic facility if Mission Valley Aquatics seeks to pursue taxpayer funding.

Park Districts

One way to generate taxpayer support is to form a park district. An example of this is the recent park district formed in Ravalli County that has helped to build and operate the Bitterroot Aquatics Center in Hamilton. Voters in Ravalli County formed a park district and the district voters approved a \$1.8 million construction bond and \$75,000 for annual operation and maintenance.

Montana Code Annotated (MCA), 7-16-2411 governs the formation and operation of park districts. According to the statute, park districts may be formed by a petition containing the signatures of 10 percent or more of the qualified electors of a proposed park district. The area of the park district can encompass a city, a number of communities or even one or more counties. A park district may also be formed by resolution of intention by the governing body (city and/or county). Given the fact that the three primary service areas discussed in this report overlap with one or more municipality, a park district is likely to include a number of communities. Based on discussions with the Lake County Commissioners, they would prefer to have a petition demonstrating the populace supports establishing a park district instead of simply passing a resolution to do so.

The petition must contain the boundaries of the proposed district, the proposed property tax mill levy that could be levied on property owners within the district or the maximum fee on each household for the operation of the district. The petition must also contain the proposed number of members of the park district commission, which must be an odd number. The county clerk must then certify that the petition meets the requirements of 7-16-2411, MCA.

Once the petition has been certified, the text of the petition must be published in a newspaper of general circulation according to the terms of 7-1-2121, MCA. The governing body must then hold a public hearing on the park district where all parties are encouraged to discuss the issues at hand. After the hearing, if the governing body determines the park district should be created, it must pass a resolution stating the

boundaries of the district, the mill levy or maximum fee per household, the number of members on the commission and call for an election on the question of whether to create the district. The election may be a special election or occur during a primary or general election and the terms of the item on the ballot must include the provisions of 15-10-425, MCA. A simple majority is required to pass the ballot issue. Once formed, the park district commission may borrow money by the issuance of bonds to provide funds for facility construction, land acquisition and improvement and operation of park district facilities.

*Water feature at Pocahontas State
Park, VA*

For the purposes of Mission Valley Aquatics, two scenarios seem most applicable. These scenarios use existing taxation districts and rough numbers. They are intended to be a starting point from which to base discussions and are not recommendations for action.

The first scenario consists of a \$3 million aquatic center built in conjunction with a fitness center at Salish Kootenai College in Pablo. This scenario assumes the land could be leased at little cost and some of the construction and operation and maintenance costs could be shared with Salish Kootenai College. By voter approval, a park district could be formed that would include the state/county tax districts shown on Figure 4. This scenario assumes a bond to be considered by the voters would have a four percent interest rate and operation and maintenance costs included in the proposal would be \$200,000 per year. This scenario also assumes \$1 million could be raised through donations, grants, direct government appropriations and in-kind contributions.

If the voters within this park district were asked to contribute \$2 million over five years to build the facility with a four-percent bond, it would cost the owner of a \$100,000 property approximately \$62.44 annually and would cost the owner of a \$200,000 property \$124.87 annually. If the bond duration was 10 years instead of five, it would cost roughly \$31.22 for the owners of a \$100,000 property and 62.44 for the owners of a \$200,000 property.

The second scenario consists of a \$6 million multi-component recreation center and aquatic facility in Polson. This scenario assumes the land would be donated to Mission Valley Aquatics and some of the construction and operational costs such as road and parking lot maintenance could be shared. By voter approval, a park district could be formed that would include the communities shown on Figure 5. This scenario also assumes a four percent interest bond, as well as \$500,000 in annual operation and maintenance funding. The scenario also assumes \$2 million could be raised through donations, grants, direct government appropriations and in-kind contributions.

If the voters within this district were asked to contribute \$4 million over five years, their property taxes would increase by approximately \$104.45 for a \$100,000 property and

\$208.89 for a \$200,000 property for those five years. If the duration of the bond was 10 years instead of five, it would cost owners of a \$100,000 property \$52.22 and owners of a \$200,000 property \$104.45 for a ten year period.

Direct Appropriation

Another way to seek support from tax payers is to receive a direct funding appropriation from a local government and/or school district. Most of the public aquatic facilities in the state of Montana, including those in Columbia Falls, Bozeman, Deer Lodge, Baker and elsewhere, receive this type of direct funding. Local governments can use existing revenues or borrow money, typically through the sale of bonds, for the construction and operation of a recreational facility. Local governments can also contribute money to another entity for the same purposes.

During past discussions with the City of Polson and Ronan personnel, they have voiced general support for an aquatic facility however the subject of direct appropriations has not been thoroughly explored. Government leaders would be likely to require a high quality proposal before committing taxpayer resources. Municipal governments can also put bond issues before voters. Voters in Kalispell recently passed a \$3.75 million bond for aquatic facility expansions and a skateboard park, \$2.9 million of which was targeted for construction. In 2003 voters in Missoula also passed an \$8.1 million bond issue to update and expand the City's aquatic facilities.

*Woodland Park in Kalispell in the early spring of 2004.
Components include a lazy river, water slides, lap pool,
shower and locker rooms.*

The superintendents of the Polson and Ronan schools have expressed general support for an aquatic facility and stated the school districts may be able to utilize a facility for swimming lessons and competitive teams. However, they stated direct funding is out of the question. Shared maintenance or similar costs may be an option, but the school boards would have to weigh the costs and benefits very carefully. Budgets at the city, county and school district level are reported to be very tight during 2004 and obtaining a direct appropriation for a new program may be difficult.

Tax increment financing

Tax increment financing is a way to pay for redevelopment of a blighted area using increases in tax revenue from an established date forward as authorized by 7-15-4201 et. seq., MCA. Redevelopment generally consists of infrastructure improvements such as sidewalks, roads and water and sewer facilities but also may consist of land, parks and recreation areas and even equipment. The blighted area must have an overall urban renewal plan that complies with the municipal growth policy. The City of Polson has adopted an urban renewal plan for its industrial and business district (where the Montana Rail Link property is located) although it does not contain plans for an aquatic facility

and so the plan would have to be modified appropriately if tax increment financing dollars are to be used for an aquatic facility project. Because the City of Polson is in the process of writing a growth policy, now is the time to seek inclusion of an aquatic facility in the urban renewal district if Mission Valley Aquatics and MRL deem the MRL property to be the most appropriate location.

In addition to allocating tax increment dollars for specific projects, municipalities can also issue bonds for projects within an urban renewal district. Such revenue bonds must be approved by the voters. The City of Whitefish has utilized tax increment dollars to help fund The Wave, whereby the City committed \$750,000 to purchase specific items.

Revenue Projection

The type and location of the facility Mission Valley Aquatics chooses to pursue will determine the costs of construction and expenditures related to ongoing operation and maintenance. Those factors will also have a large impact on visitation rates and revenue. Based on the demographic figures and visitor projections provided in Chapter I and the apparent high level of community support discussed in Chapter II, it can be estimated that an aquatic facility in the Mission Valley could generate between 41,000 and 45,000 users on an annual basis after a few years of operation. Based on those figures, annual revenue generated from users can be estimated as follows:

Pool receipts/fees (average of \$3 per walk-in visitor x 25,000 visitors) =	\$75,000
Lessons (1,500 lessons at a cost of \$7 per lesson) =	\$10,500
Classes (1,500 exercise classes participants at a cost of \$5 per class) =	\$ 7,500
Pool rental/lease (45 groups at a cost of \$50 per group) =	\$ 2,250
Concessions (goggles, food and drink, etc.) =	\$ 4,000
Season passes (100 individuals at a cost of \$125 per person and 80 families at \$150 per family) =	+ <u>\$ 24,500</u>
Total estimated revenue from visitation =	\$123,750

The visitation and revenue figures provided above are rough estimates and, as stated elsewhere in this study, defining the location, type of facility, admission price and programming options will greatly influence the number of visitors as well as the revenue the facility can be expected to generate.

Sample Budgets

Two contrasting examples of recreational facilities are either operating or under construction in western Montana. As discussed previously in this study, the Bitterroot

Aquatics' facility in Hamilton is an aquatic recreation-only facility that was constructed in 2003 and has just completed its first full year of operation. It currently consists of an outdoor six-lane lap pool, and indoor warm water pool, locker/rest rooms, a small office space and entry area. Future plans include expanding the building to enclose the lap pool and build an indoor children's pool with a zero depth entry area, play features and a water slide.

The Wave in Whitefish is a full-service fitness center that is currently under construction. It includes a gymnasium, lap pool, water slides, zero-depth entry area, day care, fitness equipment, meeting rooms, a physical therapy center with a warm water pool and other leased space. While these two examples are very different, examining the projected revenues and expenditures of both will enable Mission Valley Aquatics to better understand the costs and benefits of each type and determine which type of facility is most appropriate for the local community.

Table V-1

Expenses and Revenues---Bitterroot Aquatic Center and The Wave

Item	BAC, projected FY 2005	The Wave, projected CY 2005
Expenses		
Office supplies	3,000	8,875
Communication, trans. and postage	3,400	11,035
Printing/copying/letters	1,800	6,832
Publicity/subscriptions/dues	1,000	24,777
Legal services/auditing/accounting	15,000	9,340
Insurance	2,500	24,000
Salaries and wages	109,800	471,290
Employee benefits	12,960	69,610
Operating supplies	3,000	21,649
Cleaning supplies	2,400	12,561
Pool supplies	3,600	12,526
Other	400	23,379
Repairs & maintenance, general	4,500	18,966
Utilities (elec., gas, water & sewer)	30,000	178,144
Garbage	670	1,200
Telephone	1,800	7,541

Training	1,500	5,498
Concessions	800	13,010
Finance charge	0	11,737
Marketing, profit center, management fee	0	109,087
Total Expenses	\$198,130	\$1,002,601
Revenues		
Taxes	75,000	0
Pool receipts/fees/dues	36,000	661,603
Lessons	20,000	0
Classes/training	30,000	0
Pool rental/lease	1,500	0
Season passes	12,370	Included above
Investment earnings	300	0
Concessions	2,500	Included below
Leased space	0	79,992
Other income	0	267,389
Initiation fees	0	30,500
Total Revenues	\$177,670	\$1,036,484

Chapter VI

Sustainability

Once a facility is built, the major challenges that lie ahead are maintaining public support and paying for ongoing operational costs. This chapter describes strategies for making a facility viable over the long run. The following pages contain a discussion of operational elements, activity programming, community partnerships and organizational structures.

Operational Elements

The term operational elements refers to both the structure itself and the way a facility is run. These elements are critical because they will result in either a positive or negative public image. For a facility to bring visitors in the door, it must be attractive and well designed. The facility must be nice looking, warm, efficient and functional. Architectural elements such as an attractive exterior structure, an open entry way, a combination of natural and artificial light and different spaces within the facility are important considerations. The interior design should be functional, colorful and creative. An efficient use of space and pool design is also necessary to keep construction and heating costs down.

The lap pool should be sized appropriately to ensure it can be used for hosting competitive events. Most of the recently constructed lap pools in Montana are 25 yards in length but because a number of standards exist, Mission Valley Aquatics should

discuss the issue with regional swim teams during the design phase. Competitive events can bring revenue to the facility and support local businesses such as hotels, restaurants and gas stations.

Successful aquatic facilities have many unique design specifications and maintenance needs. The unique features range from corrosion-resistant building materials to pool decks that drain water appropriately to complex humidity control, water circulation and filtration systems. An architectural and engineering firm with a history of successful aquatic facility design should be hired to bring both the functional and aesthetic elements into a single facility design. Discussions with experienced construction contractors and managers of other aquatic facilities before and during the design stage will also prove beneficial.

The more components the facility offers the more first time and repeat visitors it will attract. The number and type of components will depend greatly on the available financing, but features like hot tubs, saunas, exercise equipment, waterslides and other play features will bring intergenerational use and will result in higher visitation numbers. A design that allows for facility expansion may prove necessary if all of the desired components cannot be built at the outset.

Water and air temperatures are also critical elements. Pool temperatures typically range from 78 to 86 degrees Fahrenheit and the air temperature is usually kept about two degrees warmer than the water. Warm water therapy pools often range from 86 to 91 degrees Fahrenheit with the air temperature about the same or slightly cooler. Cold water and air temperatures will ensure that repeat visitors do not come.

An effective management team is also critical to long term viability. The manager must have a background in aquatic facilities operation, programming and business management. A good manager will ensure the employees have strong customer service attitudes and work efficiently. He or she will also ensure proper maintenance keeps the facility functioning well and looking fresh over time.

Defining the duties of the oversight board and understanding the chain of command are also essential. Just as important is to have procedures and policies in place before the facility opens. Practices like employee hiring, discipline, a maintenance schedule, dispute resolution and daily operations will result in less employee confusion and better customer service, which will ultimately lead to greater visitation and revenue numbers.

As stated in previous Chapters of this document, the entry fee must be affordable to the majority of local residents. This will allow Mission Valley Aquatics to serve a wide range of residents and keep the number of visitors high. Visitors will also require the facility to be clean, safe and well supervised.

Activity Programming

The variety and schedule of different activities is probably the single most important factor that will determine the long-range viability of an aquatic facility. Activities should target specific market segments such as children and active retirees, but also be diverse enough to attract a broad range of visitors. The list of potential activities is long. Based on discussions with aquatic professionals, local questionnaire responses and a literature search, some of the most popular activities are open swimming, aqua aerobics and other exercise classes, swimming lessons, physical therapy, lap swimming, boater training, water safety, competitive swimming, pool parties and a host of others. The important concept is for an aquatic facility to be successful, it must appeal to a broad audience.

According to Mike Baker, the Parks and Recreation Director for the City of Kalispell, pool revenue is typically generated by every day walk-ins who want fun and exercise, swimming lessons and exercise classes. Competitive programs can also generate revenue, but not usually to the same extent. According to Bitterroot Aquatics personnel, during the summer months the majority of visitors are children and the facility manager found that during the summer of 2004, not enough time was available to provide swimming lessons to meet the market demand. A simple strategy for increasing visitation is to offer lots of affordable swimming lessons to both children and adults. The more people who learn to swim, the larger the pool of potential visitors who could use the facility over time. During the colder months, activities often cater to active adults and seniors, expectant mothers and after school programs.

All of the programs must be scheduled appropriately to encourage participation. Retirees, who make up a large percentage of the local population, tend to swim when visitation is low, typically during the morning hours. Children, whose numbers in the Mission Valley exceed national percentages, are most likely to come during middle part of the day. Swim teams and other single-purpose groups like kayakers or scuba divers can practice either during the early mornings or late evenings.

One-time attractions and theme parties can also generate substantial revenue. Aquatic recreation-related articles speak of showing the movies *Jaws* or *Endless Summer* while visitors float in the pool on inner tubes. Halloween and costume parties, birthday and graduation parties, Friday nights for teenagers and other private events can also be fun and good for the bottom line. The trick is to maintain the popular activities while continually offering creative and fresh options.

Good friends.

Community Partnerships

Successful community partnerships are essential not only to generate revenue to build an aquatic facility, but also to ensure its viability over the long run. To date a number of entities have expressed interest in establishing a partnership with Mission Valley Aquatics. They include the Polson and Ronan/Pablo school districts, the Salish Kootenai Housing Authority, health care providers, Salish Kootenai College, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, the Boys and Girls Club of the Flathead Reservation and the

Lake County, Polson and Ronan local governments. All of these entities have an interest in providing aquatic programming to their constituents and all of them can help generate resources. However, at this early stage, none of the above entities have been asked to commit resources to the project and Mission Valley Aquatics should begin discussions with them in the near future. However, it is important to keep in mind that budgets are tight and the partnerships must be mutually beneficial.

The following is a brief evaluation of some of the community partnerships that could allow Mission Valley Aquatics and the various entities to achieve their goals:

1. The school districts have the potential to provide bussing for after school and competitive programs while providing healthy recreation and water safety opportunities to their students.
2. The Salish Kootenai Housing Authority could organize trips to a facility and provide grant writing and administration services while providing healthy recreation and water safety opportunities to their residents.
3. Local health care providers could serve more patients by expanding their physical therapy and wellness programs to include water-based activities. Mission Valley Aquatics could aid those health care providers by offering discounted user rates or affordable leases.
4. Salish Kootenai College is building an exercise equipment and locker room facility that its administrators hope will expand to include a gymnasium in the near future. The potential exists to share parking, lighting and maintenance costs while providing a multi-component facility to students and local residents.
5. The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes could also help provide infrastructure, maintenance, direct financing or grant writing and administration services while providing for the recreation and safety needs of their constituents.
6. The Boys and Girls Club of the Flathead Reservation could provide substantial numbers of users to an aquatic facility while providing healthy recreational opportunities to local children.
7. The local governments of Lake County, Polson and Ronan could help provide water and sewer services, road and pathway construction equipment, labor and materials, as well as maintenance and financing assistance. Those entities would be helping to provide for the recreation and safety needs of their residents and attracting outside income to the area.

There are a number of other organizations that could be sought out to form mutually beneficial partnerships. They include local law enforcement, fire and rescue personnel, senior citizen groups, the local branch of the American Red Cross, corporate and private business entities and a number of others. One of the major barriers to swimming is the

distance between communities and the lack of an organized transportation system. Mission Valley Aquatics is encouraged to speak with potential partners about how groups of people could be transported to the facility.

Organizational Structures

Across the United States there are a number of different types of entities that operate aquatic and fitness related facilities. Many health clubs are operated by private companies, some pools are run by school districts and others are operated by municipal and county governments. Given the relatively small and dispersed market and tight school district and local government budgets, a hybrid organizational structure seems most appropriate for the Mission Valley. The following paragraphs detail two general organizational structures that Mission Valley Aquatics should consider for financing and operating an aquatic facility. The first is generally considered a for-profit model and the second is a not-for-profit model. Both organizational structures have elements of private-public enterprises, but the for-profit model is mainly a private effort and the not-for-profit model is mainly a public effort.

The Wave is being developed as a for-profit facility. The building is approximately 51,000 square feet on five acres close to downtown Whitefish. It is being built largely through contributions from private sources, although the project has received monies from the City of Whitefish for the purchase of equipment. The land and facility will be donated to the City, but then leased back to the parent organization at minimal cost. This way, the City can count the facility as an asset and borrow against its value and The Wave does not have property tax or property insurance obligations. According to the City Manager of Whitefish, the City participated in funding the effort under the assurance that visitation fees will be minimized to ensure Whitefish residents can afford to regularly use the facility. Also, The Wave managers and City have agreed to allow the City to conduct a portion of its basketball and other recreation league programs at the facility.

According to Dan Weinberg, The Wave will be run as a business by a management team that also runs a number of other for-profit recreation centers. A board of directors oversees the managers, who have been involved in every major decision, from facility design to the types of exercise equipment, since the beginning of the project. They expect the facility to realize a profit within five years. The concept behind this model is private enterprise is more likely to be efficient, cost effective and provide a higher level of customer service than a publicly run facility.

The Wave in Whitefish, Montana under construction. The main entry is shown in the center, the day care and gymnasium are located to the left, and meeting rooms and physical therapy offices are shown on the right of the photo. The top level contains exercise equipment and leased space.

In order to generate revenue, The Wave will provide much more than aquatic recreational opportunities. It is a full-service fitness center, containing a gymnasium, two racquetball courts, weight training and cardiovascular equipment, a massage therapy area, a day care, meeting room and a significant amount of leased space for two or more businesses. The Wave's directors are betting that having so many components will induce greater visitation levels, where children can go to the day care or swim while the parents use the exercise equipment, get massages, take exercise classes, swim or visit the on-site physical therapist. The Wave's directors believe this combination of efficiency, customer service orientation, multi-purpose activities and leased space for revenue generation will be profitable over time. Limiting the amount of up-front debt through private donations and by giving the facility to the City of Whitefish, and thereby eliminating property tax obligations, will certainly help to make the project profitable.

The second organizational structure is a not-for-profit model that is used by municipal-type swimming pools across the nation. The recently constructed swimming pool in Columbia Falls is a good example. The pool is a fairly basic seasonal outdoor facility that provides a passive recreational atmosphere. Within two miles of the pool is a water park and the City of Columbia Falls did not want to try to compete against this private enterprise. The Columbia Falls pool cost approximately \$1 million to construct and \$66,000 per year to operate and maintain. The annual revenue generated through visitor fees is approximately \$25,000. Stand alone pools rarely pay for themselves, particularly in small markets such as the Mission Valley or with significant recreational opportunities to compete against. Because such facilities operate at a deficit, they require taxpayer support to some degree, particularly to fund ongoing operation and maintenance costs. These types of facilities typically do not have other components such as a gymnasium and exercise equipment.

The Columbia Falls, Montana municipal pool is shown to the left. It contains a 25-yard lap pool connected to a zero-depth entry area with two children's play features. Office, changing, shower/locker and mechanical rooms are located in the building to the right of the photo.

Another example of the not-for-profit model is the facility built and run by Bitterroot Aquatics in Hamilton. This facility was constructed and is operated largely by tax payer dollars through voter approval of a park district. Approximately one percent of construction costs were reportedly donated by private sources. However, because

Bitterroot Aquatics has attained not-for-profit tax status, donations are tax deductible and the parent organization does not have to pay income taxes on revenues. This type of organizational structure, with a not-for-profit tax designation but which can receive public monies for construction, operation and maintenance, provides a good model for Mission Valley Aquatics to replicate.

The first phase of the Bitterroot Aquatics facility, consisting of an outdoor lap pool and building that houses a warm water therapy pool, locker/rest rooms, office and mechanical room, cost \$1.8 million to build and cost approximately \$165,000 during fiscal year 2004 to operate and maintain. The manager estimates operational costs will reach \$196,000 in fiscal year 2005, due largely to increases in payroll and utilities costs. The land is owned by the Hamilton School District and leased to Bitterroot Aquatics at very low cost. The outdoor pool is closed at the end of September but the indoor pool remains open throughout the year. Water purification takes place through a salt system that is controlled remotely by an engineering company in the Seattle, Washington area. This purification system has been reported to decrease the smell, eye irritation and skin drying effects associated with traditional chlorine water purification.

The above photos show the Bitterroot Aquatic facility in Hamilton, Montana. The left photo is a western view of the building with the main entry and parking lot shown to the right. The right photo is a southern view of the building and the 25-yard lap pool. Bitterroot Aquatics designed the building to be expanded so that the lap pool will be enclosed when funds become available.

According to Alice Houston, a member of the Bitterroot Aquatics Board of Directors who has worked on the project since its inception, financial tracking and book balancing for this type of enterprise is very complex. Finding a manager with a strong business and customer service background is essential, as is providing programming options that keep people coming in the door year-round. A park district commission that consists of volunteers appointed by the County Commissioners oversees the manager. Ms. Houston also advised hiring a construction manager to make sure the construction project is completed on schedule and according to project specifications.

Both models have advantages and disadvantages. A for-profit fitness center would have to have multiple components to attract visitors on a year-round basis. These facilities are much more expensive to construct and maintain (The Wave is projected to cost \$7 million to build alone) but may not require ongoing taxpayer support. However, these types of facilities are typically built in larger markets than the Mission Valley and taxpayer support may prove to be necessary if the revenue projections are not realized. A not-for-profit facility is a simpler project by comparison and is much less expensive to construct and maintain, but would require taxpayer support fueled by a major public relations campaign to convince voters of the project's value.

The choice between the two organizational structures and the type of facility is firmly rooted in the goals of Mission Valley Aquatics and the economic realities of the service area. If the goal is to provide safe, affordable and healthy recreational opportunities to

area youth and if fundraising can only provide enough dollars for a less elaborate, smaller facility, the not-for-profit organizational structure is probably the right choice. If the goal is to provide a full-service fitness center and Mission Valley Aquatics can raise enough revenue through donations, in-kind services, grants and low-cost loans to support construction and ongoing operation and maintenance costs, then the for-profit structure makes the most sense. In either case, choosing a highly visible and convenient location is essential, as is securing donations and in-kind support from various service providers. If the for-profit structure is the choice, then Mission Valley Aquatics should consider bringing in a recreation management company to help design and run the facility.



Chapter VII Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Based on the demographic information and level of community support shown in this study, it appears feasible to develop and operate an aquatic facility in the Mission Valley. However, the type of facility and the likelihood of success will depend on the location, leadership, partnerships, donations, in-kind services, grants and the level of taxpayer support Mission Valley Aquatics can generate. Without sizeable contributions from individuals, partners and the local taxpayers, and without energetic and dedicated leadership from Mission Valley Aquatics, it seems unlikely an aquatic facility can be developed and operated.

Choosing the location is of critical importance. The three primary service areas evaluated in Chapter I have a great deal of overlap and the data are quite similar. Therefore, the age distribution, educational attainment and household income measures are not sufficient to differentiate one primary service area from another. The location of an aquatics facility should therefore be chosen based on other factors.

Locating a facility in the City of Polson has a number of advantages. Polson is the single largest population center in the Mission Valley, with approximately 4,100 people within the city limits, many of whom could walk or bike to a facility. Just outside the city limits and within the nearby population centers of Finley Point, Rocky Point, Sunny Slope, Jette Meadows and Jette Lake there are approximately 2,000 additional year round residents and substantially more during the summer months. Commuters from a wide area work in Polson and Polson has the most shopping opportunities of any community in the Mission Valley. Polson and the surrounding area also see more seasonal visitors than any of the other local communities.

All of these factors translate into more potential visitors, donors, revenue and a greater chance of success. The Polson primary service area has the highest annual household income and therefore is likely to generate the greatest amount of voluntary contributions. This theory is reinforced by the results of the financing portion of the questionnaire, which showed that Polson area respondents are willing to donate to and support a bond for an aquatic facility. Because of the higher household income rates, Polson area residents could also better afford user fees. Polson also has a sizeable population of active older residents that could both contribute to and utilize an aquatic facility if desirable features and programs were available.

The Dupuis Lumber Mill property has been identified as a potential site. The property is highly visible from Highway 93 and its owners have stated they may be willing to donate land to Mission Valley Aquatics and could potentially share in utility extension costs when the overall property is developed. The owners have recently begun the local government development review process and intend to annex the property into the City, which will ensure water supply, sewage disposal, law enforcement and fire protection services are available. Due to all of the above factors, if a multi-component facility is

financed by the efforts of Mission Valley Aquatics and local residents, Polson is probably the best location for a facility to be constructed.

However, there are a few disadvantages to locating a facility in Polson. The population of the Polson primary service area is slightly smaller than either Ronan or Pablo. The Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes also have smaller constituent populations in the Polson area. Because potentially fewer of their constituents would be served by a facility in Polson, Tribal financial and in-kind support could be less in the Polson area. A lesser contribution from Tribal entities could impact the desires of the public to pass a bond or similar measure due to the fact that American Indians do not pay state property taxes and the voters may feel they would be subsidizing a portion of the population. Additionally, if strong Tribal support is not obtained, it may be more difficult to convince donors and grant funding sources of widespread community support and the ability of the project to help tackle societal issues such as race relations and juvenile crime.

If Polson is chosen as the location, it will be important to demonstrate to the Tribes that Mission Valley Aquatics seeks to provide for the healthy and safe recreational needs of the entire population. Partnering with the Tribal organizations to ensure group times and special passes would be available for children, elders and others could go a long way toward demonstrating good faith. Also, teaming up with the Boys and Girls Club, the Salish Kootenai Housing Authority and others would be very important to serving the area's recreational needs, regardless of where it is built.

The final disadvantage to building an aquatic facility in Polson is Flathead Lake. The low cost, easy access and pure enjoyment of swimming in the lake make for a significant barrier to high visitation numbers during the hottest days of the year. For an aquatic facility to succeed during that period, it must offer features and programs not found elsewhere, such as water slides, play features, supervised programs, clean lockers and rest rooms, shade, swimming lessons, aqua aerobics, physical therapy and other items.

There are also a number of advantages to building an aquatic facility in concert with the Salish Kootenai College fitness center in Pablo. The college president has stated he is interested in exploring a partnership and a low-cost, long-term property lease is possible. The combined facility would have excellent highway exposure and access, serve a larger primary service area than the one centered around Polson, and potentially generate a large volume of visitors due to the multiple fitness components and proximity to a small college and Tribal government buildings.

A facility in Pablo could help to serve recreational needs of area youth, a significant percentage of whom can be called at-risk. Pablo has both a larger percentage of youth and youth living in poverty than the national or statewide averages. Serving this market is likely to inspire other Tribal entities to participate and could increase the potential for grant and foundation funding.

There are also a number of disadvantages of locating a facility in Pablo. The Pablo area itself only contains about 2,000 people. It is situated along U.S. Highway 93 between

Polson and Ronan and the lack of transportation has been reported to be a barrier to swimming participation. The Pablo area has a lower household income rate than the Polson area and fewer monetary donations could be expected. Also, over 50 percent of the population of Pablo is American Indian, which, because they don't pay state property taxes, could limit the willingness of local voters to support a bond issue or similar measure to build and operate a facility in Pablo. To combat this perception, strong Tribal support for the project in the form of construction services, grant or direct funding and a low-cost property lease would be essential.

No matter where a facility is built, establishing strong partnerships with government officials, business leaders, health care professionals, school districts and youth and aging service providers will be essential. A strong and well-balanced financing package that includes in-kind services, donations, grants and loans will have to be in place before the tax payers will support facility construction and operational costs. Because of the size of the local population and U.S. Census Bureau household income data, it seems taxpayer support is essential.

The following is an example of a facility and financing package that appears feasible at this time:

Type of facility: Multi-component aquatic and recreational facility, possibly built in phases.

Location: Polson, along U.S. Highway 93 and within walking and bicycling distance of neighborhoods.

Construction Cost: \$4-5 million.

Donations: Land, some construction materials and \$2 million in charitable contributions.

In-Kind Services: Some construction, legal services, grant writing, etc.

Annual O&M Costs: \$450,000. \$125,000 in user fees, \$350,000 in taxpayer support.

Tax District: The Polson and Ronan/Pablo School Districts or some portions thereof.

Bond Duration: 10 years.

Taxpayer Impact: No more than \$40 per year for the owner of a \$100,000 property and \$80 per year for the owner of a \$200,000 property.

Recommendations

If Mission Valley Aquatics decides to proceed past the stage of this feasibility study, the board should take the following steps:

1. Decide on a site that will provide a suitable location using the criteria in Chapter II as a basis for evaluation.
2. Decide on a realistic facility type based on potential revenue figures and the goals of Mission Valley Aquatics. Provide features and programs that are not available elsewhere and don't be afraid to start modestly and design the facility to be expanded in the future.
3. Visit other aquatic facilities and see what is appealing and what is not. Take local government officials, business leaders, educators, potential donors and others along to get them excited about the project.
4. Hire an architect to draw preliminary sketches of the exterior and interior of the facility and to provide projected construction and operation and maintenance costs. During this stage, also consult with construction contractors, potential business partners (physical therapists, massage therapists, etc.) and a recreational business consultant to refine the facility attributes, design and costs.
5. Begin a campaign to recruit and seek commitments from community leaders and benefactors who can provide initial fiscal support and credibility to the project.
6. Mount an aggressive fundraising and public relations campaign. Seek donations of money, land, in-kind contributions (monetary or otherwise), grants and other sources of support. Use all available media, make presentations to community groups and government officials, business groups and others. Invest in professionally produced distribution materials. Public relations campaign should highlight partnerships, affordable fee structure, facility features and programs that appeal to a wide audience. Hold contests to name the facility, set financial thresholds for naming pools, trails, tiles and other physical features.
7. Form a park district or seek similar public support from local governments.
8. Take a realistic financing package to the voters while continuing the public relations campaign. The package should include hours of operation, user fees, program offerings and other details designed to appeal to different user groups.
9. If the voters don't approve, learn, improve and try again.
10. If the voters approve, hire a construction oversight contractor to ensure the facility is built in a manner deemed most appropriate by Mission Valley Aquatics.
11. Hire a facility manager who has a strong business background.

12. Develop policies and protocol before the facility opens.
13. Keep the programs that are the most popular and be creative in developing others.
14. Always cater to the market.

The above conclusions and recommendations are intended to provide Mission Valley Aquatics with direction regarding how to proceed. However, the single most important item to successfully developing an aquatics facility is not a task but an attribute. There is no substitute for a board of directors that provides effective leadership to a community project. The board must be willing to commit time, money and lots of energy to the project. Aquatics facility projects that have strong leadership sometimes fail, but those projects without strong leadership never succeed.

Mission Valley residents in a backyard pool on a hot summer day.

^[1] Many of the rules of thumb contained in this section were derived from discussions with aquatics professionals, city managers and work produced by Ballard*King and Associates, a national recreational planning consulting firm. A 2004 document Ballard*King produced for the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribal Enterprise Department was used as a primary source of information.